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# Allegiances - PART ONE

YES, A NEW BOOK! Hello previous fans of Icetail's Enemy, I am here to proudly present to you the sequel of IE, and I myself am very excited to see how this turns out. Ah, a fresh start, with new ideas, characters and much, much more. My writing has improved throughout my journey writing IE, and I think that this book may be better than the last. It may not be as emotionally developed, but I'll work my hardest at all the action, adventure and especially the character development because I think that was what defined my previous book. So, please enjoy this sequel, and let's see how it turns out! :)

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***MoonClan***

**Leader**: Icestar - battle-scarred gray tom with white paws, a white underbelly, a torn ear and amber eyes (apprentice: Amberpaw)

**Deputy**: Sharpfang - gray tom with blue eyes

**Medicine Cat**: Sweetheart - cream colored she-cat with brown eyes

**Warriors**:

Stonetooth - brown tabby tom with light green eyes

Crowflight - black tom-cat with white tail tip, white ears and amber eyes

Rosepetal - gray tabby she-cat with a sleek pelt and blue eyes

Fireshade - orange tom with green eyes and a white tail tip

Nightrose - black she-cat with white paws, a white tail-tip and white ear tips

Shadowheart - black tom with amber eyes

Redsky - ginger she-cat with green eyes

Shiningmoon - orange she-cat with blue eyes

Goldsun - white she-cat with golden yellow eyes

Skypelt - big white tom with brown eyes (apprentice: Bloodpaw)

Petalwing - small cream she-cat with a fluffy tail and blue eyes

Rainwhisker - dark gray tom with white paws and amber eyes

Volefur - large white tom with brown eyes (apprentice: Blackpaw)

Dawnstripe - light orange she-cat with brown eyes

Flameheart - rusty orange tom with amber eyes

Squirreltail - gray tom cat

Lilyclaw - light gray tabby she-cat with light blue eyes, formerly of DarkClan

**Apprentices**:

Amberpaw - ginger she-cat

Blackpaw - black tom cat

Bloodpaw - scarred reddish tom with white paws, ears and tail-tip, formerly of DarkClan

**Queens**:

Sagepelt - golden she-cat with brilliant green eyes (kits: Shadekit - gray tom kit with black tabby marks, and Berrykit - cream-colored she-kit. Father is Sharpfang).

Silverleaf - silver she-cat with light blue eyes (kits: Dewkit - white tom kit with dark blue eyes, and Ravenkit - black she-kit with white paws and amber eyes. Father is Icestar).

Swiftbreeze - gray she-cat with green eyes (kits: Smokekit - gray

and reddish tom kit with green eyes. Father is *Ashtail*).

**Elders**:

Thrushclaw- old brown tabby tom with light brown eyes

Adderclaw - brown tom with large white paws and green eyes

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***CloudClan***

**Leader**: Swiftstar - large black and white tom cat with green eyes

**Deputy**: Echoleaf - muscular brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

**Medicine Cat**: Violettooth - dark ginger she-cat with green eyes

Splashface - thin brown tabby she-cat

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***StreamClan***

**Leader**: Lakestar - gray tom cat with light blue eyes and a torn ear

**Deputy**: Ferretheart - white tom with green eyes

**Medicine Cat**: Daisyleap - white she-cat with green eyes

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***MarshClan***

**Leader**: Stonestar - gray tabby she-cat cat with green eyes

**Deputy**: Berryheart - white tom cat with ginger splotches

**Medicine Cat**:
Pineheart - brown tabby tom with green eyes

Gorsewind - brown tom with a white underbelly, white paws and amber eyes

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***OUTSIDE THE CLANS***

**Loners**

Forest - old tom cat with an unusually-colored calico pelt, and one green eye

**Rogues**

Dagger - tom cat with a mangy, unkept yellow pelt

Jinx - tom with dark brown tabby stripes and large white paws

Fang - white tom cat with yellow eyes

Lilac - small silver tabby tom with long fur and green eyes

Sunshine - golden she-cat

Rowan - large dark tabby tom

# Prologue

It was dark.

There were nearly no stars out that night, for the moon was full, illuminating the naked trees below. Light winds blew gently on the cold, sweet-scented grass, and a lone cat sitting up on a hill gazed down onto the scenery, his watchful eye on the forest. His multi-colored pelt almost looked gray under the light of the moon.

Among the other night creatures, he was fully awake and observant. All night he had been like this, unable to sleep due to an uneasy churning in his stomach and an endless thought in his head that something was not right. The forest's whispers sent chills down his spine, and his paws tingled with anticipation as he watched, unable to move from his spot.

*Perhaps I'm waiting for nothing*, he thought with a feeling of restlessness. His old eye burned with an aching for sleep, but the rest of his body couldn't shut down just yet. Despite his refusal to sleep, he badly wanted to go into a rest.

The bushes began to rattle, and several birds popped out of the treetops, soaring through the sky with illuminated black feathers and fearful screeches. The old tom pressed his belly to the cold ground and stared at the line of trees, wondering if what he was waiting for was finally happening.

Before the creature emerged from the cover of the forest, he could already tell it was a cat. No fox or badger had the lightness and grace to carry themselves like a cat—with paws that touched the ground as lightly as a feather—and certainly no fox or badger would be roaming the night like this if not for food. He stared at the silhouette as it emerged from the forest, soon followed by three more.

Those cats were strangers to him, but their scents and the identities associated with those scents were awfully familiar—*cats of the trees*.

"Forest!" hollered the tom leading the other three.

The old onlooker stared at them, unmoving and silent.

"We know you are here, Forest!" called a she-cat with her voice laced with fury. "Show yourself—we tracked you all the way down here!"

Forest watched them. The leading tom was tall, his shoulders were broad, and his brown-tabby pelt was dark against the shadows. The moment he slipped under the moonlight, he looked up at the top of the hill, spotting Forest with light green eyes.

"There you are!" the tabby tom called. "Come down here at once!"

*There's no point in waiting them out*, thought Forest as he stood up. *I guess it won't harm me to talk to them*.

Slowly, he padded down the hilltop, watching his step as the four cats stared at him, their gazes hostile. The she-cat behind the tabby tom emerged from the shadows as well, and her white pelt illuminated against the moonlight, almost looking silver. The other two smaller ones were obviously younger—their ears pricked to every sound of the forest, their eyes round with curiosity.

Forest stopped walking at the foot of the hill as he finished observing the party of cats. "What do you want?" he questioned, eyeing the tabby tom specifically. "What is it now, Rowan?"

Rowan's tail flicked with anger. "I've had a dream, and I need you to tell me what it meant."

"What are you talking about?" Forest asked calmly as he sat down, wrapping his tail around his paws. "You know that I can't get in your head."

The she-cat hissed. "Stop playing around, Forest!"

"I'm simply stating the obvious," he replied with the same tone. "Now, Rowan, what do you really want to know?"

Rowan's eyes darkened as he stared at Forest. "You *know* the dream

I speak of. I can see the glint in your eye," he stated, "and you, who looks after the forest, always knows the fate it is about to become."

There was a silence after Rowan had finished speaking. All four of them stared intently at the older tom, who calmly remained seated at the foot of the hill. The sky became darker as clouds overhead shifted to cover the illuminating light of the moon. Forest looked at the sky, and his calico pelt was becoming its usual color once more.

Finally, he looked at Rowan once more. There was a long pause before he spoke. "The dream you had—the one of the two brothers fighting; the death of the white-furred one; the despair of the gray-furred one . . . these are all events that have happened not long ago."

"And who are these cats that I've seen?" demanded Rowan.

Forest's single eye closed and he took a deep breath. "They were two brothers bound to a fate where one would lead, and the other would destroy. The one who had survived was the one who was destined to destroy, and it seems that his fate is soon going to be tied with you."

"You mean the forest is in danger?" Rowan snarled in response. The white she-cat and their two younger friends became worried as well, glancing at one another with fearful expressions. "Tell me Forest, how can I prevent this cat from destroying us? How can I stop what's yet to come?"

"What you think may not always be what it seems," Forest stated simply, his single his green eye looking beyond the trees.

Rowan's expression filled with disdain, ears flattening back slightly as he narrowed his eyes. "You're just going to let us get destroyed? Tell me what to do so I can save us all!"

Forest didn't respond—he simply stood up, giving a long stretch, before he walked past Rowan and his three friends towards the tree-line.

"Where are you going?" demanded Rowan, whirling around to see

Forest's rear. "You haven't answered my questions!"

Without turning around, Forest called, "I'm going to my den; I expect no cat to follow me." Rowan opened his mouth to protest, but Forest continued to talk, cutting him off. "And there *is* no answer to what you ask. The cat who destroyed is coming, and there's nothing that's going to stop the new fate of the forest!"

With those final words, he disappeared in the cover of the trees, his tail becoming the last visible thing before he was gone. The four cats stood there with disbelief as the moon in the sky became visible once more, flashing down its bright light onto the cats of the forest.

**a/n: just a reminder; you must read the first book, Icetail's Enemy, before proceeding on with this one!**

# Chapter One

Icestar's belly felt warm. He was lying on his back, his face toward the sky as he rested in a patch of grass that bathed underneath sunlight. His fur heated against the fresh and cold new-leaf air; he felt grateful to have such a moment once again. Slowly, his eyes closed as he drifted off into a nap.

For a few moments, Icestar was able to remain like this. He felt relaxed, and his heartbeat steadied. After fixing up the camp, hunting and patrolling for so long, he hadn't been able to catch a moment of rest for what seemed like the entire two moons since the day of the battle. Recovering MoonClan had been more important above anything else, and rest wasn't easy. So finally, he felt like he had some peace . . .

Suddenly, a heavy weight landed on his belly, and his eyes opened quickly as he lost his breath, startled.

"Ha! I made it here first!" a high-pitched meow exclaimed. "You're so *slow*, Dewkit!"

As Icestar regained his vision, he recognized soft black kit-fur and a pair of light amber eyes staring down at him.

"G'morning, Icestar!"

"Ravenkit . . ." he gasped, his voice low.

"I-I'm not slow!" Dewkit stammered, cutting Icestar off. "Before I got the chance to say go, you went off on a head-start!" His white fur fluffed up as he stared at his sister with an angry expression.

Icestar felt slightly annoyed that his kits were already bothering him so early into the morning. Before Ravenkit had the chance to protest, he turned himself over, causing them to fall onto the ground with surprised squeaks. He looked down at both of them as they scrambled to their little paws. Dewkit sat down respectfully,

scared of a punishment, but Ravenkit stared at Icestar with the same type of annoyance he had.

"What's with that look, Ravenkit?" he asked his daughter. "You seem —"

Ravenkit snorted. "I'm not mad."

Dewkit snapped his head towards her. "You obviously are, genius!" Icestar glared at him, and when the white-furred kit noticed, he looked down to his paws, ashamed. "Err, sorry."

"You better be sorry," Icestar said. When Ravenkit snickered, he added, "*Both* of you. Now tell me why you're bothering me again?"

"It was Ravenkit's idea," Dewkit mewed quickly. "She's the one who said that we should race, and whoever reached you first would win." His big dark blue eyes stared up at his father, trying to look convincing. "I—we're not in trouble, are we?"

Icestar took a deep breath, calming himself down again. Sometimes he wondered how he could contain his self-control, but it was probably because these were his kits. Ever since they became more independent, all they wanted to do was either mess with his head or compete with each other. Despite that, he still loved them with all his heart.

"Are they bothering you, Icestar?" a new voice rose up. Even though he recognized the voice, he turned around to see his silver-furred mate.

He nodded, accepting her warmth as she stood beside him. "They are, Silverleaf. I think they deserve punishment; did they come outside the nursery without permission?"

"They did," she said with a sigh. "Honestly, you two are a pain in the tail!"

Ravenkit stood up taller, her black fur sticking out at the end angrily. "That's not true, we're old enough to go outside on our own! We're almost two moons!"

"That's not old enough," said Silverleaf, shaking her head. "You've only began eating real prey a quarter-moon ago. Just because you get to do it like the other warriors, it does not make you a warrior." Her voice was stern. "I can take it from here, Icestar."

"That's really, *really* unfair!" shouted Ravenkit angrily, stomping down a paw.

Icestar sighed. His daughter was always more defiant than innocent little Dewkit, and she was the one who had always wanted to travel outside camp, hunt, and do everything she was not supposed to. She was loud and disturbing, too, but perhaps it was because she was just a kit. Icestar even felt a little bad for Dewkit, because whenever they did something they weren't supposed to, it was always Ravenkit who had convinced him.

"Let's go, kits," said Silverleaf, beginning to pad to the nursery.

Ravenkit scoffed. "I'm not going!"

"Just do what she says," snapped Dewkit, obviously annoyed at this point. "You're not the boss of anyone here."

"Says the one who's trying to boss *me* around," she exclaimed. Silverleaf stopped walking and gave Ravenkit a stern look. "Err—I'm coming, Silverleaf! I was just about to start walking!" She quickly raced ahead of both her brother and mother to get to the nursery.

Icestar sighed, shaking his head while also feeling a bit amused. Despite the trouble they caused he was glad to have kits like them, and especially such a good mate. He wondered what life would be like if his daughter, Lightkit, had survived that day that the battle had began. He missed her dearly even though he and Silverleaf never got to know her.

A nose nudged his shoulder, snapping him from his thoughts. "Good morning, Icestar," greeted his sister, Lilyclaw. "Sharpfang has started to assign patrols, so it'll be time for everyone to go soon."

"Okay," Icestar replied. "I hope you catch good prey."

She nodded excitingly. "Of course I will! The Clan is still recovering

from the loss of prey and the battle, so I'll try my best today." Eagerly, she walked off to meet her patrol near the warrior's den.

As he watched her go, he felt glad that she was adjusting well. At first when she had asked to join the Clan two days after the battle, the whole of MoonClan had been weary and skeptical of her joining, but now almost two moons later, she had made great friends with everyone and seemed to be happy. Unfortunately, it wasn't like that for Bloodpaw—a young apprentice they had saved from DarkClan and had let join the Clan. He was quiet most of the time and liked to bully the kits, but at the very most, he respected older warriors and hunted well; despite his differences Icestar believed that Bloodpaw would be able to completely immerse himself with MoonClan, just like Flameheart had. Both Lilyclaw and Bloodpaw were overall good additions to the Clan.

Sharpfang had also been appointed as Icestar's new deputy, due to his hard work, strength and long experience within MoonClan. The death of Ashtail would sometimes haunt Icestar, but he learned to go past the brutal murder of his previous deputy with the help of Silverleaf. He was grateful for having Sharpfang as the new deputy, and everyone agreed that he was the best choice.

Even though his kits were out of his fur, he couldn't go back to his nap now that he was on his paws. *Maybe I should join a patrol*? he thought, looking up into the bright sky. The days, though still chilly, were warming up slowly. Prey was quietly returning to the forest as well, and MoonClan was almost back on their paws from the long moons of hunger and battle last leaf-bare.

*There is no more DarkClan bothering us,* he recalled*, So a hunt should be good . . .*

He went off to the medicine den where he spotted Amberpaw working on her apprentice duties. She was helping Sweetheart along with Blackpaw to tend and sort through the herbs. Their sibling, Goldenpaw, had died in the battle two moons ago, and even though the dead apprentice's family had grieved for a long time and are still grieving to this day, Amberpaw had been the strongest among them.

He poked his head inside the den, only to be greeted by Berrykit. "Hi Icestar!" Sharpfang's young daughter said cheerfully. She was nearly six moons old now, but unfortunately, she had caught whitecough a few days ago and had to spend her time there until she got better.

"Hi Berrykit," Icestar purred. "How are you feeling today?"

She shrugged. "Like yesterday."

Sweetheart looked up from her work of assorting berries. "She's been improving greatly compared to yesterday, actually." The medicine cat sounded proud. "Little to no coughing! She's the quickest patient I've had to recover from whitecough."

"That's good to hear!" he said, impressed. In these past two moons, MoonClan lost no other cats since the Dark Battle. They had many losses in the fight, and had been weakened by the war, but he was happy and relieved that his Clan had managed to pull through.

"It's 'cause she's a kit," commented Amberpaw as she finished stripping leaves from their stems. "Kits usually have stronger systems than us older cats."

Berrykit's nose flared. "I'm no kit, I'm nearly an apprentice! Besides, you're an apprentice too!"

"My warrior assessment is near," said Amberpaw proudly. "You had better treat me with respect, because who knows if Icestar will make me your mentor?"

Berrykit opened her mouth to respond, but Icestar spoke instead. "All of that is to be determined, and it's unlikely that a young warrior will receive an apprentice."

"But Dawnheart and Volefur got apprentices when they were young warriors!" retorted Amberpaw. "If I work hard, maybe I can too!"

Sweetheart gave her an amused look before asking, "So, what brings you here, Icestar? It's unusual for you to stop by without reason."

He nodded. "I almost forgot, but I came for Amberpaw. I'm taking

her out hunting," he replied. Blackpaw's ears pricked for a moment, before he continued to separate dead herbs from the healthy ones. "Do you want to come too, Blackpaw?" he offered.

Blackpaw shook his head slowly. "No . . . I'm content with finishing up our duties here," he said softly. "Amberpaw can go; I'll be here." And with that, he continued to do his work quietly, his tail wrapped around his paws neatly.

Icestar gazed at the apprentice with sympathy. He had been like that ever since the war, especially because his sister hadn't survived it. He wished that he could do something for Blackpaw, but he knew that wounds to the heart took their own time to heal. After all, it took Icestar many moons to get over the death of his mother, before learning not to dwell on the dead.

"Can Flameheart come with us?" Amberpaw asked as she finished cleaning up her paws on a wet piece of moss.

Icestar was briefly amused; Amberpaw had been latched on tightly to Flameheart like a tick ever since they fought together. "Unfortunately, I saw him leave on a patrol earlier, but I will have Bloodpaw and Skypelt join us for today. So how about it?"

She groaned. "Any cat but Bloodpaw!"

Sweetheart shook her head disapprovingly. "Amberpaw, you must accept that Bloodpaw is now a MoonClan cat. Though he may be mean and a pain in the tail, he's no longer of DarkClan—and they don't even exist anymore."

"I'm not saying that he's disloyal," she mumbled, "It's just that no cat likes him. Well, except for the older warriors."

Icestar rolled his eyes. "He's still a work in progress."

"What does *that* mean?" Amberpaw questioned.

He completely dismissed the matter, annoyed. "It means that we're trying to help him become closer to the Clan—anyways, that's not the point. The more we do this, the closer you'll be to becoming a warrior." Amberpaw's ears pricked with interest. "If you prove to me

today that you can be mature, I can assure you that your assessment will be soon."

Quickly, the apprentice's head nodded. "I'd really like that!"

"Have a good hunt," Sweetheart said as they left the den.

Once Icestar was under the sun again, the chill of the medicine den quickly left his spine as he went around to find Bloodpaw. He spotted the young tom laying down beside a clump of ferns, his reddish wind-swept fur reflecting the sunlight off his pelt. Bloodpaw's eyes opened, which contrasted from his colors as a light, cold blue. Their eyes met, and Bloodpaw didn't avert his gaze for a second. Icestar didn't blink.

*You don't intimidate me*, the leader thought as he approached the former DarkClan apprentice. Bloodpaw looked up as Icestar's shadow loomed over him.

"Yes?" Bloodpaw asked.

"Come on up, we're going hunting," Icestar said.

"With who?"

"My apprentice, your mentor." He looked at the camp entrance, where Amberpaw had already gathered Skypelt. "You like to hunt, right?"

The apprentice stood up, and licked his paw, running it over his untidy fur behind his ears. "I like to fight just as much." He gave a long yawn and stretched, before he padded on ahead to the camp entrance.

Even though Icestar himself disliked the things Bloodpaw tended to say, he was—at the very most—respectful and obedient. He seemed to understand that leader's word was law, and he even listened to older cats with better ears than the other two apprentices. *DarkClan must have been strict on ranks*, Icestar thought, recalling how Ripplefur and Mudclaw had been mistreated.

*I believe Bloodpaw is a good asset no matter what cats might think of*

*him*, he concluded. He remembered the day when that same red pelt first turned up in their camp; he was shredded and with a messed up paw, eyes round and full of fear. Out of sympathy and a newfound tendency to look for the good in cats, Icestar had agreed to let the young Bloodpaw join. After all, he was just a young apprentice and had nowhere else to go, and had learned nothing but the messed up ways of DarkClan.

*Bloodpaw deserves this chance with us*, he thought.

As Icestar caught up with Skypelt and the rest of the patrol, he led everyone outside the camp, already tasting the forest scents. It was like the first day he had taken a step outside camp as an apprentice; everything was new, ready to be explored.

"We're going to DarkClan's—err, StreamClan's borders today," Icestar said, quickly correcting himself.

"Why not DarkClan's?" asked Bloodpaw, tilting his head to the side like a curious kit. Except his eyes weren't full of curiosity. They sparked with defiance and strength and a need for acceptance.

Icestar stammered through his words. "Well, where the old cave of mosses use to be, I heard there was a good hunting spot."

"We already hunted there yesterday," pointed out Bloodpaw. Amberpaw shot a glance of annoyance at him, as if she wanted to force him to shut it. "I heard from Rainwhisker that DarkClan's old territory is striving with prey."

"The trees haven't recovered from that forest fire . . ."

"Don't try to avoid going just because that's where I was born," Bloodpaw snapped. "Flameheart was born there too and he had no problem going on that patrol there with Rainwhisker yesterday."

*But Flameheart is different than you*, thought Icestar, also feeling slightly annoyed.

Skypelt gave Bloodpaw a look of disapproval. "That is no way you talk to your leader. I suggest you apologize to him right now," he ordered.

Bloodpaw stared at Icestar indifferently. "I'm sorry, Icestar."

The leader simply shook his head. "It does not matter much; DarkClan it is. Bloodpaw is right, he'll have to face that place sooner or later."

"*I* think near the cave of mosses was a good place to hunt," Amberpaw chimed in, trying to defend Icestar. "You don't have a right to boss our leader around, Bloodpaw." Her ginger fur was sticking up in the back, and her tail was flicking.

Bloodpaw rolled his eyes, but he didn't say anything.

"It's okay, Amberpaw, we're going to DarkClan," Icestar said. "Let's get a move on before we lose time."

He began to lead his patrol through the forest, and Amberpaw caught up right to his side, obviously not eager to be sticking near Bloodpaw. Skypelt trailed behind with his apprentice behind him as he explained to him the current conditions of his old home. When Icestar turned to look at him, his eyes were a bit sad, but he nodded with understanding and pretended as if he did not care.

"It's surprising that Icestar and Dewstar were really brothers," meowed Bloodpaw as they continued to walk. Icestar's ears pricked, curious. "I mean, I wasn't there when Sandstar died, I was born after that. But during Dewstar's leadership, he treated us like . . . nothing. A Clan that only had to be strong."

"A Clan has to be strong," Skypelt replied.

"But that was *it*," Bloodpaw continued, "That was all DarkClan was. That's why we lost the battle; MoonClan's bond with the forest was too strong to be destroyed. There's something that goes around the camp much different than how I was raised, and that is friendship. Dewstar was truly evil."

Icestar's memory returned to that night during the battle, where Dewstar has fallen to his death.

"I'm glad Icestar killed him," Bloodpaw meowed. "We can finally live in peace."

Dewstar's confession and fears whispered within Icestar's head, and he thought, *I never killed him! And he and I were never different! We both ended up doing what we had to, to protect someone we cared about!* Despite knowing this, he definitely did not have the ability to confront any cat about what he learned and experienced that night. His memories would only be understood by him alone.

"It's terrible that Icestar named his kit after Dewstar, too," Bloodpaw said, his voice more monotoned.

Amberpaw whirled around, clearly hearing what he had to say. "Listen here, Bloodpaw! Just because Dewkit's name is the way it is, that doesn't mean he was evil like Dewstar!" Her fur was standing up with rage.

Icestar whirled around, staring at all three of his patrol cats. "That's enough!" he ordered. "I don't want to hear a single word about Dewstar anymore, got it? And do not bring Dewkit into this discussion!"

Skypelt stared at Icestar with surprise, since the leader normally never snapped at his Clanmates like that. Amberpaw simply looked guilty, and Bloodpaw grew silent.

He took a deep breath. "Listen, Amberpaw, you're going to have to get use to Bloodpaw being in our Clan, alright? Though it's been two moons, I *know* he's a loyal cat." Then, he looked at Bloodpaw. "*You're* going to have to be more respectful to other apprentices, and especially the kits. No more bullying, got it?"

"Yes, Icestar," they both mumbled at the same time.

"Good," he said. "Skypelt, try to keep your apprentice close to you once we enter DarkClan's borders. Even though the territory is becoming prey-rich, some trees are unstable, so we'll have to be careful."

Skypelt nodded and said, "Bloodpaw, you heard our leader."

"Amberpaw, stick close to me too," Icestar called over his shoulder as he crossed the border. "Don't forget that we aren't here to argue,

we need to hunt for MoonClan."

Amberpaw gave a respectful nod and caught up beside her mentor's side, her mouth parted slightly as she smelled the forest around her. Skypelt went off into a different direction, already aware about what time to meet back.

Icestar himself looked around, wondering where to find a safe place to catch some prey. MoonClan was still healing from their strike of hunger last leaf-bare, especially since the battle was not long ago. He wanted every cat to be ready and on their feet by the time the hot season arrived, especially because he didn't want his kits to have a sad early memory.

He could hear the flapping of birds above head on the trees, and he looked up. For a moment, he was tempted to jump up on the branches after it, but he suddenly remembered how DarkClan's trees were unstable, and that it was not a good idea to be trying to climb them.

*I'll try to stick to the ground*, the leader thought. *It's safer, anyways.*

After a bit more looking around, Amberpaw padded up to him proudly with a squirrel in her mouth. "Look what I caught!" she exclaimed. "Great, isn't it?"

"That's good," he praised her, admiring the plump squirrel between her jaws. "It's enough to feed the elders, at least."

Amberpaw nodded with excitement. "When will my warriors assessment be?" she asked, tilting her head. "I can already fight and hunt as well as a warrior! Am I still not good enough?"

Icestar saw his apprentice's bright eyes, and purred. "No, Amberpaw. You're just as well as any warrior can be—after all, if it wasn't for you, MoonClan wouldn't be standing to this day." He recalled how Amberpaw brought CloudClan into the Dark Battle to aid MoonClan. It must have been scary for her, leaving her Clan to run all the way to their camp, but he admired her quick-thinking and her bravery.

"Then what's taking so long?" she said, dropping the squirrel at his paws. "I have to become a warrior! My apprentice days should be long gone, don't you think?"

"That's true," Icestar agreed. "You're the most qualified apprentice. Don't worry, it'll happen soon."

In that moment, she had brightened up, and her tail lifted into the sky with pleasure. "Yes!" she cheered. But then, she paused. "Wait, what do you mean I'm the most qualified apprentice?"

Tiny paw steps scuttled in the hollow of a tree, and the scent of mice filled the air. Icestar crouched down so he could catch them. Before he crept forward, he whispered, "Bloodpaw's much too young and Blackpaw has not been showing any improvement these last two moons."

He pressed his belly to the ground, moving forward very slowly and quietly. DarkClan didn't have any undergrowth to hide from prey, so it was harder to hunt there despite the new prey that came into the forest. He had to make sure that they weren't seen or spotted somehow.

"That's because he's still upset about Goldenpaw." Amberpaw stopped herself. "Wait, what am I saying? It's as if I don't care that she died at all!" Her ears flattened back with guilt.

"Nonsense!" Icestar murmured, before he dashed from his spot. The mice had no time to react as he pounced into the hollow. There were two of them—one which was already darting past his paws, but the other was trapped at the corner of the den, squeaking madly.

Icestar hooked his claws into its thin, tiny tail, and it scratched at his paws as he bit into its spine. To his delight, it stopped moving. He picked it up into his mouth and turned around, discovering that Amberpaw had caught the other one. It hung limp from her mouth, and she briefly seemed proud about it despite her thinking about her sister.

"Good job, Amberpaw! You're doing a better job than me!" he

praised, and her face brightened like the sun.

She dropped her catch by her squirrel. "Well, I told you that my skills were acceptable."

"Never said they weren't." Icestar walked past her and sniffed the air after he dropped his prey by her. "Let's catch one more thing before we return to the border—"

Icestar's words were cut short the moment he heard a loud boom in the distance. His ears pricked, trying to pinpoint the sound. Birds overhead flew into the sky, and prey scuttled away quickly into the safety of the forest. *Oh no, did anybody get hurt*? he thought worriedly, waiting in his spot.

After a moment of waiting, a red pelt was seen darting through the trees.

"Icestar!" yowled Bloodpaw as he hurtled closer. "A-a tree fell on Skypelt!"

Icestar froze. "Is he okay?"

Bloodpaw stopped running, and began to pant with exhaustion. "Y-yes . . . he's okay, somehow." Relief seemed to wash over Icestar. "But his back paw is stuck and he's in a lot of pain."

"I knew we shouldn't have hunted here!" growled Amberpaw as she picked up her prey again.

Icestar remembered the day he fought Dewstar. The trees were loose back then, too, and Dewstar's whole body had gotten suck under a great tree on fire. Icestar didn't know how he did it, but somehow he managed to grab his brother free and escape . . . perhaps from the pressure of a little time, or the adrenaline of the battle. But it was only for Dewstar to end up dead at the cliff-side. That very memory sent a chill up the leader's spine.

He shook the memory away. "L-lead the way, Bloodpaw," Icestar murmured as he grabbed his own prey.

"Icestar, are you okay?" Amberpaw asked with concern. "You look a

little sick."

He walked past her and began to follow Bloodpaw. "I'm fine, now keep up! We've got to help Skypelt!"

**a/n: it feels so good to write with fresh new ideas. I hope this chapter is as good as the last book's first chapter! Please let me know if there are any mistake, don't hesitate to correct me. (1/1/16)**

# Chapter Two

***a/n* thanks for all those grammar corrections! SORRY FOR POSTING THIS LATE. I HAD WRITERS BLOCK ._. also, I was in a rush. Tell me if I made a dumb mistake and/or had wrong grammar, please! :)**

Dewkit stared at the swaying branches of the trees above-head from the nursery, bored out of his mind. The leaves were still sprouting from the naked branches, and the warm season was slowly growing. The cats of the Clan often spoke of how great new-leaf was, and although he was excited to finally experience it, he realized for the first time ever how slow everything took to regrow.

Ravenkit gave a bored sigh beside him, and slopped over his back.

"Ravenkit, you're heavy!" Dewkit complained, shoving his sister. Unfortunately, she was bigger than him, and he was trapped under her weight. "Get off!"

Her sleek black fur was shown from the corner of his eye. "No way, there's nothing else to do but bug you," she replied, not moving even a bit. "It's all your fault for getting us in trouble."

Dewkit growled under his breath. "My fault? *You're* the one who said we should race!" He squirmed underneath her, until she finally fell off, landing on the floor with a loud squeak. "Thanks for always getting *me* in trouble, Ravenkit. Now we can't even go outside."

Ravenkit scrambled to her paws. "I'm not always getting you in trouble!"

"Are too!" he shot back, batting her face. How dare she not admit to her own silly games? He never came up with the ideas that got them in trouble all the time in the first place! She's being so unfair!

"That's it!" she snarled, and she leaped at him, pinning him to the ground with unsheathed claws. They dug into his shoulder, and he

yelped before kicking her off with his back paws.

Before they could clash again, Silverleaf stormed between them, her nostrils flaring with anger. "Why in StarClan's name are you two fighting again?" she demanded, shooting them both angry looks. Dewkit shot a look of annoyance to Ravenkit, and the she-kit scoffed in response, looking to the side. "You know, you're not making this punishment better for you at all."

"She started it!" Dewkit blurted out, his big blue eyes giving his mother a pleading look. "Just because she was the one who got us in trouble, it doesn't mean she gets to attack me!"

"That's not what happened at all!" Ravenkit yowled angrily.

Shadekit growled in his sleep. "Be quiet, Ravenkit! You're so loud!" He opened an eye, and glared at the two younger kits. "Can't you two take this outside or something? Some of us are trying to get some sleep."

"I would, but I'm not allowed to leave the den, thank you very much!" she replied hotly, stomping a little paw down on the ground.

Shadekit gave a long yawn. "I'm never having kits when I'm a warrior," he mumbled, falling right back asleep.

Ravenkit rolled her eyes and looked at Silverleaf. Their mother gave a deep sigh, before she spoke again. "Ravenkit, your brother is right. You should stop proposing these silly ideas that keep getting you both in trouble."

"I told you!" Dewkit said.

"But," she continued, shooting her son a warning glance, "that doesn't mean it's all her fault. You don't have to follow what she does, Dewkit. If you stop encouraging her with her silly ideas, then maybe you both wouldn't have been in trouble right now."

Dewkit stepped up. "But that's not fair!"

"Life's not fair," mumbled Ravenkit.

*Why does Silverleaf always take Ravenkit's side?* thought Dewkit with frustration. *I'm her kit, too!* He looked up at his beautiful mother and sighed. It wouldn't work no matter how much he protested—Silverleaf always took control of everything. If she wanted, she could even change the way how his father lead the Clan! He saw the deep love they shared, and how they often listened to each other. If only she listened to her own *kit* like that.

Suddenly, he could hear something else going on beyond the nursery. He peeked outside the den, and his eyes widened when he spotted his Clanmates gathering around a tired Amberpaw.

"Wow, what's going on?" Ravenkit asked, pawing Silverleaf.

Silverleaf noticed it too, and her ears pricked. "You kits stay here," she mewed as she padded outside the den.

Of course, Ravenkit followed her. Dewkit wanted to call out to his sister to say that she was just going to get into more trouble, but instead, he decided to go after her. *I should just remind her not to disobey Silverleaf*, he thought. Besides, he wanted to figure out what was going on too. Shadekit was right at his tail, perhaps curious as well.

Dewkit got to the center of the clearing and stuck by his mother's tail, nervously peeking around. It was true that he already knew every cat of the Clan, but he felt shy since there were so many cats around the camp at once.

He looked around before his eyes landed back on Amberpaw, panting with exhaustion.

"What's going on?" Sharpfang asked the apprentice, padding up to her. Shadekit took a place by his father's side, and for the first time ever, Dewkit realized how much they looked alike. Shadekit was tall and had the look of a fighter, and he seemed so powerful even though he was just a kit. *I'm always going to be small and helpless*, he thought glumly. *I'm going to be the worst warrior ever . . .*

Ravenkit's ears perked with interest as she spoke.

"Sk-Skypelt has been crushed by a tree!" Amberpaw blurted out, trying to catch her breath.

Silverleaf stiffened, and Squirreltail gasped in a panicked voice, "I-is he alright?"

Dewkit pressed closer to his sister, feeling upset. Skypelt was Silverleaf and Squirreltail's father—they'd be devastated if anything terrible had happened to him. After all, they lost their mother when they were young and he was the only one they could look up to.

After Amberpaw recovered herself, she began to explain. "It's not as bad as it sounds, but his paw is trapped under the tree and Icestar, Bloodpaw and I couldn't get him free, especially because he's in pain." She looked at Sharpfang. "We need Sweetheart's medicine . . . and a few strong cats to help us get him free!"

Sweetheart nodded with understanding. "I'll prepare some herbs for you to take," she informed, before she rushed to the medicine den. Dewkit stared after the medicine cat, curious. *How are herbs going to help him? Isn't getting him free* more *important?* he thought.

"I'll go!" Ravenkit immediately called. "He's my kin, I've got to help him!"

"I thought I told you to stay in the den," Silverleaf snapped, pushing her daughter back with her hindleg. "Sharpfang, I'll go. Skypelt is my father and I have to make sure that he's okay."

"Me too," Squirreltail piped up. "I'll go too."

Sharpfang nodded. "I'll go too. It's decided, that's as much as we need. The rest of you stay here." He turned around and met Rainwhisker's gaze. "I trust you to make sure that the Clan is okay when I'm gone."

Rainwhisker gave a curt nod, and Amberpaw said, "Everyone's going to have to keep up with me. We're running all the way to DarkClan's borders and we'll have to be careful there because the territory is still unstable after the forest fire." Amberpaw met Dewkit's worried eyes, and she gave him an assuring look before

she ran to the camp entrance.

Silverleaf returned a gaze with Sagepelt. "Please watch over those two troublemakers until I get back. This might take a while," she meowed. Then, she looked at Ravenkit and Dewkit. "I expect you two to listen to Sagepelt and Swiftbreeze and behave, got it?"

They both nodded, and Dewkit said, "Yes, Silverleaf."

They watched as they ran out of camp. Amberpaw was easily ahead everyone, her being one of the fastest cats in Clan. Shadekit also watched as they went, longing in his eyes perhaps to go out there as well.

When they were gone, the older kit sighed. "I wish I get to be an apprentice soon! For nearly six moons, I've been waiting in the camp like this. I haven't had any action since the Dark Battle!"

Sagepelt nudged her son affectionately. "Don't worry, you'll be an apprentice soon, and a good one at that," she encouraged. "Hey, don't you think Berrykit has her eyes on being a medicine cat?" She turned to the medicine den, and Dewkit looked too. He could see her dozing off on her makeshift nest.

"No way, she'll more likely be a warrior," Shadekit said. "She's tired of sticking around there all day."

"You'll never know," Sagepelt said. They continued to talk about Skypelt's incident, and Dewkit gave a bored sigh and padded to the direction of the nursery, his tail drooped to the ground. There was nothing for him to do; nowhere to go . . .

Ravenkit was at his side in a heartbeat. "Hey, where are you going?" she questioned, ears perked with interest.

"Back to the nursery. We're punished, remember?" he questioned as if she was dumb.

"Yeah, I remember." She paused and looked around the camp. "But Silverleaf left. That gives us the freedom to do *anything*!" Her eyes glinted with mischief. Dewkit knew that look too well; she gave him those eyes whenever she had an idea.

"Oh no, what are you planning this time?" he asked, taking a step back.

Ravenkit shook her head. "It's not a plan—I call it a scheme. I'm really good at scheming!" She sat down and licked her paw, drawing it over her ear. "Look around you . . . most cats are out on patrol, and all that's left won't notice us go."

"Just tell me what you want!" he snapped.

She leaned closer and whispered, "Let's go explore! The forest can't wait for another four moons until my paws reach it!"

Dewkit's eyes widened with horror, and he shook his head with fear. "No, no, no, that's the worst of all your schemes so far!" he exclaimed, bolting upright. He glanced nervously around the Clan hoping that no cat heard, but was relieved to see that the elders were still dozing off, Swiftbreeze and newborn Smokekit were still asleep, and Sagepelt and Shadekit were still talking.

Ravenkit's eyes became very pleased. "Why not? We won't have another chance!" She looked at Shadekit angrily. "The moment *he* steps out of camp, he'll be boasting to us how great it is to be outside! I'd feel great if I could just experience it first."

"But I'm less capable than Shadekit of handling myself within danger," he pointed out. "You too!"

"Not true! Amberpaw taught me how to fight!" Ravenkit stubbornly argued.

Dewkit rolled his eyes. "She taught *us* how to pounce."

"Sh-she taught me other things," mumbled the black-furred she-kit, her ears flattening with embarrassment. "It doesn't matter anyways, though. It's not like we're going to have to fight!"

"I'm not going," said Dewkit sternly, not eager to break the rules.

Ravenkit's nose flared and she held her chin high. "Suit yourself. I'm sneaking out!"

"How?"

"You're not coming with me, so you don't have to know." She padded away from him, and Dewkit rolled his eyes before sighing. Ravenkit was so troublesome! All she liked to do was make a mess out of things, get scolded for it, and make a mess again!

*Icestar will be proud of my decision*, he thought, padding to the nursery. *I'll just wait until he comes back to tell him what Ravenkit's up to!*

The moment he walked into the nursery, he heard an annoying scratching sound. He looked around but there was nothing here except for Swiftbreeze and her son Smokekit sleeping, huddled next to each other for warmth.

*What could that be*? wondered the white kit wondered as he peeked outside of the nursery again. The sound grew louder, so he took a step out into the fresh cold air. Suddenly, he realized where the sound was coming from—the back of the den?

"Hey, Dewkit!" called Berrykit. "Want to play with me?"

"Not—not now," he stammered. "Go play with Shadekit."

Berrykit shrugged, not detecting at all his suspicious attitude. "Alright," she mewed, padding away near the camp entrance. Shadekit and Sagepelt were still talking their heads off.

Dewkit focused his attention away from them and padded to the back of the nursery, spotting a familiar black pelt poking at the sticks and brambles of the camp's barrier. His fur spiked and his eyes widened. "What in StarClan's name are you doing?" he gasped.

Ravenkit jumped, startled, but the moment she saw Dewkit relief washed over her eyes. "Oh, I thought you were someone else! And I told you, I was escaping," she whispered. "So keep it down."

Dewkit got angry. "Escaping like *this*?"

"I've been working on this for a few days," she explained, her voice low. "It's almost done, and since there's barely any cat around, I'm

taking this as an opportunity!"

He rolled his eyes. "It's not going to work—" he was cut off with a *snap*.

"I've made an opening!" she cheered softly.

"You're not really going?" Dewkit gasped. "Are you?" His heart pounded with a nervous, steady beat. He hated breaking the rules, and his sister knew that. *So why is she always trying to do something wrong*? he thought. *It isn't fair!*

"I'm going." Ravenkit turned her amber eyes on him. "If you want to come, you can, but I'm fine on my own." She turned back to the small opening, and crouched down so her head was at its level. Dewkit watched her, hoping she wouldn't fit through, but as she poked her forepaws and head through, he knew that she would. Her body slipped past the thorns and thistles, and he heard her from the other side slip through a bush until she was finally free. "I'm out!" he heard her cheer.

"P-please, think about what you're doing," he insisted.

"I did! I'm on my way now! Are you coming or what, Dewkit?" she called.

Dewkit shook his head to himself sternly. *No, I can't*, he thought. *If I want to be a warrior, I have to follow the rules! After all, warriors are disciplined . . .*

"Alright then, I guess I'll see you later," she meowed, beginning to pad away. As her paw-steps got fainter and fainter, he grew more nervous. What if she got attacked by a fox? What if she got caught by a patrol?

The fur near his haunches were prickling with fear, and he took a deep gulp. *I can't just let her go by herself! If she gets attacked, I'll have to protect her!* he reasoned with himself. He crouched down at the opening's level, and looked through to see if he'd be able to get through. He realized that he'd be fine since he was smaller than his sister, so he stuck a paw through the thorns, hoping he wouldn't

prick his pelt. "Here goes nothing," muttered Dewkit.

"Hey, Dewkit?" called a new voice. It was Berrykit again!

Nervously, he pushed himself through the brackets quicker, slitting his pelt against one of the thorns along the way. He held back a yelp of pain as he forced himself to wriggle free from the bush, falling down to the forest ground.

"Huh, strange," he heard the older kit say. "Dewkit was just here moments ago . . . Ah, well, he's probably sleeping. I'd better go back to Sweetheart."

Dewkit stayed intensely still until she was gone. Once he realized that he was safe, he took a deep sigh of relief. "I did it!" he breathed. "Wait, I did it? I'm in the forest!" He jumped with realization, and looked at his surroundings quickly. The tall trees were endless it seemed, but the view from the outside was much more beautiful than from within camp. "Great StarClan," whispered Dewkit to himself as he observed the scenery.

Though the snow had mostly thawed, the forest had specks of white from here to there. The trees, though, were naked, with tiny budding leaves on its branches, along with small bird nests near the log. Slowly, he began to pad forward, eyeing his surroundings with both fear and excitement. It was amazing! Being out here seemed like anything could happen, but he felt like he had more freedom than he could ever wish for.

For a moment, he continued to enjoy the forest, slowly padding forward. He took in all the scents around him, before suddenly catching a whiff of Ravenkit's scent. *I nearly forgot*, he thought, jumping with surprise. *I was going after my sister! But . . . where did she go?* Dewkit looked around, hoping to see his sister's familiar black pelt and amber eyes excited to see that he had followed her out into the open, but she was nowhere in sight.

"Great," he muttered. "Now I have to go find her!"

# Chapter Three

[image]

***a/n*** **Whoa, whoa, whoa. This was a long time ago (look at the pic)! Who remembers this? Actually, who's been reading my book since "Old Wattpad" lol? I guess here's some inspiration to help you grow if you're a FanFic writer like muah!**

**Don't hesitate to fix any of my dumb mistakes, too! :) I appreciate it.**

Delicate wings fluttered with grace around the air, beating gently with a soft rhythm. The creature—a small butterfly—landed on a flower tucked by the roots of a small oak tree, and it began to suck on the nectar. After it was finished, it launched into the air again and began to fly into a different direction, perhaps to where another flower was. Little did the butterfly know that it had already gotten a taste of its last meal.

A black shadow leaped into the air with outstretched paws, and had pinned down the butterfly by its wings on the bare forest ground. The butterfly struggled, but it was no match for the kitten that had it pinned. With weight as light as a feather, it couldn't even compare to its attacker.

The kit's black tail flicked with pride. "I told Dewkit that I knew how to hunt!" she puffed angrily, releasing her paws from the already dead butterfly. "I wish he were here. If I tell him about it, he won't believe me." She gave a deep sigh and looked up at the branches above-head. Suddenly, her spirits lifted. *Perhaps some tree-climbing would cheer me up!* she thought, quickly forgetting her foolish despair.

With excitement, she raced towards the nearest tree. "Hmm, how do I do this again?" she muttered to herself, closely examining the dark wood. "I remember Blackpaw once telling me that it has something to do with my claws . . ." She placed her tiny paw onto the bark of the tree and sunk her claws into the wood. It was softer than she'd

imagined! Maybe instead of pulling herself up, she'd have to walk up as if she were walking normally on the ground? She didn't know much about climbing, except for that one time she ambushed Shadekit by hiding out on top of the nursery, and pounced on him when he got close.

She'd never seen him so mad, and he was already a grumpy denmate!

The bushes behind her rattled, and Ravenkit jumped with fear at the sudden noise, quickly whirling around. She half expected a fox or a badger to appear into the open space, but there was nothing there. *I'd better get up this tree fast before I get caught by Icestar's patrol!* she decided, gazing up at the tall oak.

Pushing her thoughts behind her head, she leaped onto the bark, claws sinking into the wood, allowing her to stick easily. Nervously, she unhooked one of her forepaws and tried to grip a branch above-head, but her legs trembled from carrying her own weight that she wasn't used to. She tried to ignore it and grabbed on to a sturdy-looking branch, and she hauled herself up with force. Once she steadied herself on top of it, she looked down, feeling successful . . . only to find out she hasn't gone too far up.

"Mouse-dung, this is hard!" she muttered to herself, and she turned to look up at the top of the tree once more. It'd take far too long to get up *there*!

Suddenly, she heard a familiar yowl. "Ravenkit! Where are you?"

Ravenkit jumped with shock, but she had no time to react. Instantly, her claws seemed to unhook from the tree and she lost her footing. The next thing she knew, she had hit the floor, her body sprawling over the the forest ground with pain.

Dewkit gasped, surprise in his eyes. "Oh Ravenkit! Are you alright?" His blue eyes scanned over his sister worriedly.

Ravenkit felt a bit annoyed that Dewkit had actually decided to follow her out into the open. She was even more annoyed, though, at the fact that he caused her to fall from the tree. "I could never be

better," she muttered, her voice reflecting on her attitude.

Though Dewkit seemed to pick up her demeanor, he shrugged it off. "Anyways, let's get back to camp—"

"No!" Ravenkit suddenly cut off. "You go back. I want to explore!" Quickly, she scrambled to her paws, regaining her balance. For a moment, she was mad at Dewkit for being so annoying, until she saw a long thin, light scratch running down his side. "Oh StarClan! What happened to you?" she exclaimed, suddenly worried.

"What do you mean?" he asked. Her eyes stared at the scratch and he finally got the hint to turn around. Once he spotted his scratch, he said, "Oh yeah, that. I got it from climbing out the tunnel. It's no big deal, really."

"You'd better clean it up," Ravenkit said. "What if it gets infected?"

"Small cuts like this can't get infected," Dewkit objected. "What are you, the medicine cat?"

Ravenkit flared. "No, I'm just trying to help!"

He sighed and looked around the trees. "Help me find a cobweb or something so I can patch it up." She gave him a confused glance, so he explained, "I noticed how Sweetheart puts cobwebs to close up cuts, so I think it's worth a try."

"Oh, that's right!" she mewed, remembering seeing that on a few cats due to the Dark Battle when she was really young. They began to pad through the forest as they searched around the trees and hollows. "I wish I knew where to find it, though . . ."

"It could be anywhere, right?" Dewkit's eyes looked within a small den dug under an elm. "Oh, wait! I see some!" He stuck his head through the small opening as he looked around. Ravenkit watched. Finally, his head emerged from the hole once more with his nose scrunched up in disgust, though a wad of cobwebs hung from his mouth. After spitting out the cobwebs, he said, "The stench in there is terrible! I wonder if that's a fox den."

"Wow," Ravenkit gasped. "Do you think we'll see an actual fox?" Her

mind suddenly whizzed with excitement as her thoughts wandered off. She imagined the fox coming here to find them . . . but she'd leap up and fight it off! When she returned to MoonClan with the fox's pelt dragging behind her, Icestar would have to make her a warrior! Only that it wouldn't happen.

"We have cobwebs, so let's get out of here," mumbled Dewkit. "Foxes are scary. Haven't you seen the wounds Sharpfang showed us?"

"They're no worse than a cat," retorted Ravenkit, "because Icestar's scars were caused by cat claws, not fox claws. That obviously means that we'd be stronger than the fox."

Dewkit rolled his eyes and began to trot away with the wad of cobwebs. Ravenkit raced after him, a bit disappointed. She'd hoped that he would stay, but it's probably for the best that they went somewhere else to tend to Dewkit's wounds.

Once they had gotten far enough from the fox den, the territory was now unfamiliar. Though Ravenkit wasn't afraid, she was eager to see what the forest had in store for her. *As long as I get back to camp before Icestar and Silverleaf, I'll be fine*, she reassured herself.

Dewkit sat himself in front of a bush with tiny budding leaves on its branches. She followed and sat beside him, licking his wound clean. "I'll help," she said between licks. "I don't think you'll be able to reach back here anyway."

"Thanks," said Dewkit. Then, he took a deep breath. "I feel that I'm going to get in trouble for my wound. Silverleaf is gonna question why I have it—"

"Tell her to you tripped on a thorn."

"—but then she'll be mad that I didn't go to Sweetheart to tend to it."

Once Ravenkit saw that she'd done a good job, she took the wad of cobwebs in her mouth and messily began to cover the wound. "Don't worry," she stated smoothly. "I'll make sure we get back fine

and no one will know a thing!"

"I bet someone already noticed us go!" snapped Dewkit. "Shadekit is sharp."

"He was talking to Sagepelt when we left!" she objected, angrily pressing down the cobwebs to make sure that they'd stick fine.

Her brother flinched away from her. "Ow, that hurt!" he snapped. "And I bet they're long done talking now! Maybe Icestar already got to camp—and its all your fault. If you'd of never left we wouldn't be in trouble."

Her head was starting to grow hot with fury. "We didn't even get in trouble, don't jump to conclusions, mouse-brain!" For a moment, they glared at each other with hostility, before Dewkit took a deep sigh and looked away. Ravenkit didn't take her gaze off her brother.

*He shouldn't of followed me if he was going to complain about being in the forest*! she thought. *Why is Dewkit so complicated*? She sighed, shaking her head. Her brother was too good to be true; he only wanted to please their parents. Ravenkit was determined to follow her own path, because after all, there were so many things she wanted to do in her Clan *different* than everyone else.

*I do want to be a warrior*, she thought, *but I long for something more!*

"Come on, let's go back to camp," mumbled Dewkit. He stood up and began to pad away.

Ravenkit sighed. "Alright, fine. I guess we've had enough of an adventure." She paused, and looked at her surroundings. "But wait . . . do you remember the way back?" The territory they were now in was very unfamiliar. She wondered if they traveled far enough to have gotten lost. *No*! she reassured herself. *We can find our way back.*

"I don't remember the way!" Dewkit gaped. "Are we—"

"No, we're not! This is MoonClan territory and we're MoonClan cats. It shouldn't be that hard finding our way around, right?"

Dewkit looked at his sister unsurely, and his tail flicked before he opened his jaws to taste the air. For a moment, Ravenkit wondered what he was doing, before she realized that he was trying to find the way in which they came from through scent. She did the same and turned to a different direction, breathing in the scents around her. The only thing she seemed to pick up were herbs . . . leaves . . . perhaps prey in their burrows, too. Suddenly, a terribly pungent scent entered her nose.

She slowly turned to Dewkit. "Do you smell that?" she asked, a slight trace of fear in her voice.

He nodded eagerly. "Yes! I think I found the way back to camp!" he exclaimed, excitement traveling throughout his whole body.

For a moment, Ravenkit felt a bit relieved. Then, she remembered the strange scent and moved in close to Dewkit, whispering, "There's someone lurking around here. And it's *not* a MoonClan cat!"

Dewkit froze. "Now that you mention it, I smell something terrible!"

A moment of silence erupted between the two kits as they cautiously looked around. *Who is it*? thought Ravenkit. *CloudClan? MarshClan*? Her shoulder pressed with Dewkit's small body, and she looked up, trembling with fear as she heard a twig snap.

A few tail-lengths away, stood an extremely battle-scared tom with very broad shoulders, bared teeth and outstretched claws. She could see that his fur was once a magnificent yellow, but now it was stained heavily, looking like a dirty, unkept and matted dark brown.

Dewkit finally saw him too and flinched.

"Come out, little kits," snarled the tom. "I won't kill you, I just want a bite . . ." When he turned in the direction of Ravenkit and Dewkit, Ravenkit swore that she saw a menacing look in his eyes. She was terrified that he'd seen her for a moment, before he walked on by, not leaving the area. "Come out, kits, or I'll find you!"

Ravenkit looked at her brother. "We have to run," she mouthed.

His eyes grew round his fear and he shook his head immediately.

"Trust me!" she mouthed again. *All we have to do is follow the scent back to camp. Once we get there, some cat can help us*! she replayed in her mind. It had to work! But first, she had to make sure Dewkit was ready to bolt. This tom had a crazed look in his eye, and if any of them got caught, who knows what would become of them . . .?

*I'll never see Icestar or Silverleaf again*! she thought with fear.

Finally, after a moment of waiting, Dewkit gave a small nod. In that moment, Ravenkit's heart pounded in her chest, and she nervously looked at the tom. His back was turned; they could do it. She looked at Dewkit and nodded back, and in that instant, the two of them hared through the undergrowth.

For a moment, Ravenkit was convinced that she could get to camp without being seen, but she suddenly heard the tom yowl. "There you are! Running like rabbits!" He instantly began to pelt after them, and Ravenkit's fear grew twicefold. How could they possibly outrun a full-grown rogue?

That thought didn't stop her. She pushed herself to run faster at her brother's side. In the distance, she could see the camp walls forming. They hadn't been too far at all! Without risking a glance back at the tom, she already knew that he was gaining on them. *Please, don't catch us! Leave us be! Icestar, Silverleaf; help!* she thought, wishing she was with the protection of her parents again.

They were so close to the camp. The small hole that she had made to escape was coming in view, and she braced herself to ram right through. *Wait*! she thought. *I have to let my brother get in first*! She skidded to a halt at the entrance.

Dewkit's wild eyes met her's. "What are you doing?" he demanded. They risked a swift glance at the tom. One leap and he'd get them!

"Go!" she yowled, shoving him through the tiny entrance. Dewkit had no choice but to go first. After she had made sure he was in, she slipped into the hole as well, wishing she were smaller. Thorns had scraped against her pelt when she rushed through. As she burst

through the other side, back into camp, she thought she had finally gone to safety.

Then suddenly, a crash sounded behind them. The rogue had bashed through the small entrance, making it big enough for a full-grown tom to fit in now. His pelt was bloody and covered in thorns, leaves and branches. He looked at Ravenkit, and hooked his claws on her tail as she tried to scramble away.

Her screech pierced the air, and Dewkit looked at her with fear. "Ravenkit!"

Ravenkit's tail erupted with pain as the tom dragged her close. "I caught you!" he said triumphantly, the craze never leaving his voice. "My prey!"

She struggled like crazy against his grip, but she couldn't get free. He grabbed her by her scruff and easily lifted her. He almost left, until several cats had immediately emerged by the side of the den. Sagepelt's voice was the loudest. "Let her go!" she demanded, her fur bristling with rage. "You are outnumbered!"

Blackpaw was standing slightly behind Stonetooth and Rosepetal, who were sending out threatening hisses. Swiftbreeze was also there, her teeth bared and her growl loud. Berrykit and Shadekit were at Sagepelt's side. She tried nosing them away, but they wouldn't leave.

Dewkit looked up at Ravenkit, then bravely at the rogue. "Let my sister go!" he demanded.

Ravenkit felt weak, weaker than newborn Smokekit could possibly be. She felt smaller than him, too. She was humiliated, scared, in pain, and guilty. This was all her fault! If only she never schemed!

The rogue refused to let her go, and he turned to run at the opening he created. Swiftbreeze was faster, though. Her long legs pushed her off the ground and she leaped, landing on the tom's back instantly. He let Ravenkit go, and she fell to the ground with a thud. Dewkit, Shadekit and Berrykit were at her side immediately, helping her up and leading her away.

"Don't worry, you're safe," Berrykit said reassuringly. "All those warriors are beating that rogue to the ground!"

Dewkit buried his nose in her black fur. "I thought you were a goner!" he cried. "I was so scared!" In response, she gave him a small purr.

Shadekit being Shadekit had nothing to say as they helped her to the medicine den. Sweetheart rushed to Ravenkit's side and gently scooped her up, gesturing for Dewkit to follow. Shadekit padded away, but Berrykit followed, obviously worried for her denmate.

As they got inside the medicine den, Sweetheart put her on the makeshift nest. "Tell me what hurts," the medicine cat ordered as she readied some herbs.

"M-mostly my tail, and my neck. My scratches sting, too," she mumbled. "My brother's also got a mean scratch under those cobwebs of his."

"I'm fine, please tend to my sister," he said, backing away.

Sweetheart nodded. "Very well. Your mother and father and going to want to hear about this when they return from DarkClan's old territory."

Ravenkit gulped. *I'm in for some big trouble . . .*

# a/n 1

Ah, I'm an idiot for posting my first a/n in the beginning of the story. But I am so sorry---I decided to discontinue the series---I suck at writing and...

Don't freak out, I'm just kidding.

Anyways, I haven't posted in like a month because I'm on a long-term writer's block. I am trying so hard to continue writing chapter 4, but after like another 2 to 200 words, I am stuck again and again. There's so many ideas set out for the beginning, middle and end of the series, but right now I'm kind of stuck in between the beginning-middle and this is getting frustrating.

Don't worry, I'm trying my best to post the next chapter. Sorry to keep y'all waiting, I understand if you are mad, because you have every right to be. Please be patient for just a little longer; soon the new chapter will be out!

Again, sorry :,(

# Chapter Four

[image]

**a/n @Mistyheart101 is AMAZING. This fan-art was originally supposed to be for Icetail's Enemy, but since I'm a turd and forgot to post it there, I'll be posting it here! You guys have should go check out her drawings! Btw, thanks for being patient for the next update.**

Icestar paced around, a bit frustrated. He'd been like this for a little while now. It felt absolutely *impossible* to lift the tree from Skypelt's leg. He, Bloodpaw and Amberpaw could not do it alone, so he ordered his apprentice to fetch help at camp. They should be arriving any moment now; Skypelt looked as if he was at his limit, and there was no doubt that the bones crushed under the tree of his hindpaw were broken.

*This'll give Sweetheart a lot of work*, he thought with a sigh, recalling the memories of what happens when a cat breaks their bones. He couldn't even imagine the pain that Skypelt had to withstand!

Bloodpaw, who was picking at the barks of the tree like Icestar ordered, spat out a rotten piece. "When will they get here?" he asked, trying to hide the complaint from his voice.

Skypelt grunted. "Hopefully soon!"

Icestar nodded, giving his friend a comforting lick around the ear. "Amberpaw's fast, she'll be here before you can say rabb—"

"I'm here!" an unusually high-pitched voice puffed. With great relief, Icestar looked up to see his apprentice Amberpaw, panting out of breath which explained her tone of voice. Silverleaf was next to reach the fallen tree, just as breathless as the younger she-cat. Her eyes met her father's and she gasped, rushing to his side. Squirreltail and Sharpfang arrived next.

Bloodpaw seemed just as relieved as Icestar. "I thought you'd never

make it," muttered the scarlet-furred apprentice.

Sharpfang gave him a disapproving look. "Hush, Bloodpaw. Amberpaw's the fastest cat in camp, and there's not a single one who can outrun her."

Icestar recalled the times that Amperpaw had been desperate to learn the tricks to being fast as a younger apprentice. She was always slower than the others when she first started out, never reacting quick enough to fighting moves or leaping for prey. But the shame of that must have led her to push herself harder than the rest, training her legs to run and move faster than any other cat in MoonClan's. He felt proud that she took such an initiative.

"Maybe Swiftbreeze could, but that doesn't matter." Amberpaw gulped down the last bit of air before letting her breath run out smoothly. "What's more important is helping Skypelt."

"What of Sweetheart?" asked Icestar, looking in between the four of them.

Squirreltail stepped up, and spat a bundle of herbs to the ground. "She said this would do it for the pain. She could not come because some cat needed her, and she'll tend to Skypelt once he gets to camp."

Icestar observed the pile, trying his hardest to remember what they were. When he simply couldn't recall, he nodded towards Amberpaw. "Give Skypelt some."

Amberpaw did as told, and pressed some of the herbs to his mouth. As soon as he licked them up, Sharpfang padded by the tree. "Alright, I will need every cat's help to shift the tree. Bloodpaw, stay by Skypelt to help pull him out. I'm guessing he cannot do it alone."

"Don't worry, we'll get you out," Silverleaf said assuringly to her father. She gave his ear a comforting lick before padding by Icestar's side, giving him and the others a nod.

When the others nodded that they were ready, Icestar ordered, "On my count. One, two, three!"

Every cat's legs strained as they tried their best to move the tree. Bloodpaw stood to the side, waiting for a chance to pull his mentor out, but that chance never came. The group stopped with exhaustion, and they all looked at Icestar.

"It's not working," Squirreltail murmured, his eyes round with fear.

"It has to!" Silverleaf objected.

Icestar cut off the two siblings. "Of course it is going to work, you shouldn't become frustrated after the first try. Perhaps we have to dig Skypelt out . . ." He observed the surroundings, wondering what he could use to help pull out the senior warrior.

Bloodpaw stepped before all the MoonClan cats, his ears angled forward. "I have an idea." The rest snapped their eyes toward the young apprentice, and he pointed his ears backward before turning his head. "This has happened before when I was a DarkClan kit. But look," he stated, observing the pine forest behind them.

Icestar looked as told, and he saw hills as tall as a tree, covered in more trees and vines that were turning green from the changing season. He wondered what Bloodpaw was getting at.

"Look at what?" questioned Sharpfang with impatience.

"We could tie those vines around the tree Skypelt is on, tie it to another tree, and uproot that other tree to lift this one." He stared at the group. "When one tree falls, the other will lift, if they're at least the same size."

Interested, Icestar asked, "How would you uproot a tree?"

"Most trees in the territory are loose anyhow!" he pointed out. "Maybe a heavy push will do. If anything, we could dig a bit."

"But some other cat can get crushed—" Amberpaw pointed out.

"And it could take too long," continued Silverleaf, cutting off the apprentice she-cat.

Icestar shook his head, interested in Bloodpaw's proposal. "No, this

could work."

"Well, we cannot just stand around!" snapped Sharpfang, already trotting up the hill. "Talking won't help Skypelt. Let's get this over with."

"And quick!" pointed out Squirreltail, following the deputy. Icestar looked at Skypelt, who's eyes were closed with pain. He swiftly gave his friend a promise that he would help him out, before running up the hill as well with Bloodpaw and Silverleaf. Amberpaw stayed behind, a bit frustrated, by the side of Skypelt.

By the time Icestar reached Sharpfang and the others, Bloodpaw had already pointed out a tree good enough that could do the job. Its wood was dark and thick, but it moved ever so slightly at the touch of the wind. Its roots were just as loose as the tree that hit Skypelt, so he knew it would work for sure.

"Next, we've got to find the perfect vine," explained Bloodpaw, as he looked around in the treetops. Every cat scanned the naked branches budding with tiny leaves, hoping to make out the perfect vine. It was not until Silverleaf gave a yowl of delight.

"Look, there's the perfect one!" she exclaimed, pointing with her tail. "Icestar, if you could throw one end to us, Sharpfang and I could tie it. Squirreltail and Amberpaw can work on the other end with the other tree over there."

Icestar nodded with approval. "Well done. Everyone, get in to positions. Bloodpaw, come with me."

Icestar leaped onto the nearest tree with Bloodpaw by his heels. Their eyes were on a vine hung overhead. It seemed to be long enough to reach both trees, and hopefully thick and strong enough to lift the heavy weights. Icestar was proud of Bloodpaw for coming up with such a great idea to prove to MoonClan his worth, and he was as well proud of Silverleaf's good eyes.

He hauled himself up a nearest branch with strong forearms, and scrambled up. The branch swayed a bit at his weight. For a moment, he was completely still in fear of falling, but when he felt

reassured enough to go on, he leaped to the next branch and unsteadily hooked his claws into the bark. *I won't fall today*, he thought. *Not with Skypelt still in pain*!

For a moment, he was about to leap up to the next branch, until he heard Bloodpaw struggling. He peered down to see the young apprentice's reddish fur spiked up in all directions, his chest heaving with exhaustion.

"Bloodpaw!" Icestar called, wondering if he should have taken Amberpaw up instead. "Are you alright?"

"I-I never did much tree-climbing!" he admitted, his eyes round. He looked more like a kit than ever, especially by looking weak. Bloodpaw was usually solemn and quiet, always looking for a chance to boast his skills. After all, as a six-moon-old apprentice, he's gotten quite far with training, being two moons ahead for the reason that he grew up in DarkClan. But now, he looked for once like he was struggling.

Icestar lowered down. "Let me help you," offered the leader.

Bloodpaw's nose flared, but he didn't say anything. Perhaps he was too proud to admit he needed help, but he wasn't dumb enough to say no.

Icestar's jaws gripped into Bloodpaw's scruff, and with all his might, he tried to lift him. This was nothing like lifting his own two-moon old kits off the ground, who were as light as mice. Lifting Bloodpaw was more like lifting two fattened rabbits.

He successfully lifted Bloodpaw despite his weight, and the apprentice's claws scrambled through the bark as he attempted to pull himself up as well. After much struggle, Icestar finally managed to bring Bloodpaw up next to him.

Panting, Bloodpaw murmured, "Thanks . . ."

"No trouble," agreed Icestar. "Let us not waste any time—"

The branch they stood on swayed uncomfortably, cutting off Icestar's words. The two toms immediately tensed, knowing that it

was too weak to support both of their weights.

Without a second to waste, Bloodpaw hurled himself off the branch and onto another, gripping his claws onto the bark before hauling himself up with his back paws. Icestar looked up ahead and saw the vine was close, so he leaped as well into another direction.

"Bloodpaw!" called Icestar the moment he landed, since they were on the opposite side of the tree from each other. "Grab one end and take it to Amberpaw!"

"Yes, Icestar," Bloodpaw responded.

Icestar looked at his own end of the vine, noticing how most of it was stuffed into the high trunk of the tree. Perhaps a nestling squirrel bundled its moist and thick leaves into its den, since the scent of the squirrel was strong, but it had most likely fled due to the presence of cats onto its tree.

He grabbed his own vine, and looked down to Silverleaf and Sharpfang, who were waiting anxiously by the tall, standing tree. The vine was difficult to pull, but he managed to do it anyway, yanking it on his way down. When he was halfway to the ground, he noticed how close standing to the tree's branches were, so he decided to leap onto it.

"Icestar!" gasped Silverleaf. "That's not a good idea!"

Icestar struggled, pulling his vine onward. "It's fine," he mumbled, knowing that he shouldn't let go. He took a swift glance backward, noticing that Bloodpaw had already gotten to Amberpaw, and she, Bloodpaw and Squirreltail were already tying a firm knot to the tree. Icestar was close enough to the ground now, so he jumped off the branch and landed unsteadily onto the earth, his paws wobbling a bit.

"Are you okay?" Sharpfang asked, noticing his trembling paws.

Icestar forced himself to walk forward, and spat out the vine. "Yes, I'm fine, but Skypelt is not. Let us get this done quickly."

Silverleaf gave a nod of understanding and took the vine,

immediately running to the other side of the trunk and back, to wrap the vine fully around it.

"It has to be much more secure than that," Icestar mumbled. "Tie the vine to the branches, too, and wrap it around a few more times. Then, give it a pull to make sure it'll stay. I will be right back." He trotted away from his spot, scrambling down the slope to meet up with Squirreltail and his group. "How are things going here?"

"They're going just fine," mumbled Amberpaw, as Bloodpaw leaped off the top of the fallen trunk.

"Bloodpaw's doing great," Squirreltail said. "With his small size, he was able to wrap the vine efficiently enough. I think we're just about ready."

Icestar crouched by Skypelt. "How are you holding up?" he asked his friend.

"F-fine. I think I've forgotten the pain," murmured the white-furred tom.

Icestar gave Skypelt a comforting lick around the ear, before standing up to face Squirreltail once more. "Alright, come help us uproot the tree. Sharpfang and Silverleaf might be just about finished. Amberpaw, Bloodpaw, once this tree lifts, help pull Skypelt out, alright?"

Amberpaw and Bloodpaw nodded in unison and then glared at each other as Icestar led Squirreltail up the slope, trotting to quicken his pace. Once he reached Sharpfang and Silverleaf once more, he noticed that the vine had been tightened securely, and that their plan would surely work.

"Let's start by pushing it in the opposite direction," meowed Icestar, already placing his paws on the trunk. Everyone else got into position also. "On my count. Three, two, one!" Every cat gave a strong push. The tree swayed a bit like planned, but it was far to heavy to tip. "Try one more time. Three, two, one!" With a huge effort, Icestar pushed with all his might. The tree shifted a bit and his heart had grown hope as his paws dug deeper into the cool dirt.

Finally, after much struggling, the tree finally tipped.

"Watch out!" Sharpfang warned the patrol as the tree came crashing down. As it fell to its side, Icestar stared with shock as the tree's roots pulled apart from the ground, flinging up into the air with a loud crackling sound. Dirt splayed all over every cat's pelts, and a rushed wind brushed past Icestar's face as the tree finally settled to its side. His ears angled back as he heard the other tree's weight lifting. He whirled around to see that the two apprentices were indeed doing their jobs, dragging out Skypelt from under the tree, but the tree croaked and the vine stretched—Icestar became a bit nervous.

For a short moment that seemed like eternity, every cat rushed past Icestar and ran towards Amberpaw, Blackpaw and Skypelt. Skypelt was laid on his side, with blood pooling around the bottom half of his body. Thankfully he was still awake. Silverleaf was soothing her father's fur as Amberpaw set the cobwebs and gave him more herbs; Sharpfang helped Skypelt up onto three paws as they slowly limped away from the scene.

Icestar wanted to rush toward Skypelt, too. He wanted to comfort his friend, too . . . but his paws did not move. Something was calling him; the smell of Twoleg stench and heather; the sound or echoes and projection.

There was another cave opening.

As fast as a rabbit, Icestar dashed from his spot and skidded to a halt beside the uprooted tree. Staring down, he didn't see at all the remains of roots, twigs, seeds and dirt. There was indeed a cave, and inside, loud noises clanked, perhaps rock against something else. Several tree-eaters tore at the boulders down in the cavern, and Twolegs were everywhere—there were perhaps twice as many as there had been before.

The cavern was under DarkClan, and it was uprooting trees one by one, tearing the land beneath it. The scent and the noise scared off the prey, and the land was crumpling.

*The other Clans*! Icestar thought, his fur prickling with unease. No

cat inhabited DarkClan's abandoned territory, but there was surely no telling if the other Clans were in danger of this too. After all, DarkClan's territory was at the center of the entire forest.

* * *

As the patrol walked back to camp, Icestar and Sharpfang trailed behind the patrol. Silverleaf and Squirreltail were helping Skypelt slowly limp back to camp on either side of him, talking softly together.

"I am going to have to mention my discovery during the next gathering," Icestar murmured to his deputy after telling him what he saw. "DarkClan is in the center of the Clans' territories. We could *all* be in danger."

Sharpfang shook his head unsurely. "But is it wise causing a riot? Maybe the destruction is for DarkClan alone."

"But if Twoleg stench spreads, that will drive away the forest prey, and poison the lakes!" he growled, slumping his shoulders as he walked. "Only StarClan knows what will happen to the forest because of the caverns."

"Maybe they don't." Sharpfang stopped in his tracks, and picked his head up to the patrol ahead. "There's a strange scent around camp. We'd better run ahead to check it out . . ."

Icestar nodded, and trotted a few paces quicker, brushing by Silverleaf and the rest as he went. Passing a few more bushes, the leader and deputy finally saw the cam—though he knew something was wrong. Without waiting, he ran down the slope leading to the camp entrance, and slipped through the opening.

He was immediately met by the surprised gaze of Blackpaw.

"You're back!" murmured the apprentice. "Something bad happened to Dewkit and Ravenkit. They escaped camp and were chased by a rogue—"

"They *what*?" Icestar cut off, his heart stopping in his chest.

Silverleaf slipped through the camp entrance as well. "Oh StarClan, are they okay? I shouldn't have left camp!"

"They're fine, but we caught the rogue that tried to kill them," Blackpaw said.

Icestar exchanged a quick glance with his mate. "We'll deal with the kits after. First, take me to this rogue, Blackpaw." A deep growl of anger rumbled from the back of his throat.

*How dare some cat threaten MoonClan and my kits!*

# Chapter Five

**Hey guys. I just realized something about my account; the only stories I have written are 1) Warriors books, and 2) drawing books. I am seriously considering posting a work of my own creation. If I ever do, I'd like you guys to check it out :) I don't know yet, it is still a very early idea. But later on, I guess we shall know for sure if this will happen or not.**

**Anyways, on with da chapter**.

Icestar shouldered past Sharpfang, Flameheart and Goldsun, who were all crowded around the rogue prisoner, guarding him from running away while at the same time observing him with hostile eyes. The MoonClan leader gazed down at the dirt-covered, battle-scarred tom with anger. *This cat dared to threaten us*! he thought, his blood burning. *If only I could just run my claws through this cat's ear.*

He'd think twice about messing with MoonClan again!

A breeze ran by Icestar's nose, and his fur prickled with unease as the rogue tom's glowing amber eyes met his. Something about this stranger seemed off. His anger grew more as he gave the rogue an intimidating look. However, the rogue remained to be unswayed by Icestar's threatening glare.

"Who are you?" Icestar demanded, his voice laced with menace. If a gaze doesn't hurt, perhaps some harsh words of interrogation would. He was itching to see just who this cat really was. He was unlike any rogue Icestar had ever encountered before.

The rogue looked up at him. "You don't deserve to know my name," he spat, his pelt bristling up to make him two times bigger. The exhaustion and thirst for water was clear from the tom's raspy voice. "I come from a forest of a great system of cats, greater than this system of Clans here, you rotten crow-food!" He hissed and backed up, his ears flattening against his head.

*What a fox-heart*, he wanted to say, but he kept it to himself. Instead he took a step closer, his anger unfaltering. "A forest, you say?"

"Filled with powerful and stronger cats far from here," the tom continued. "And if our leader finds that anything has happened to me, he'd be enraged!" His crazed eyes widened with a crooked smile.

A second breeze led the rogue's scent into Icestar's nose; a foul, yet very unfamiliar scent. *Just where does this cat come from*? he thought, the anger boiling deep inside. He smelled faintly of a forest that could be scented upwind sometimes in the far distance, normally on the edge of the MoonClan and CloudClan territories. But he never knew that other cats could come from there.

"Yet you are covered with signs of hardships, aren't you?" Flameheart demanded, taking a step forward. "Fresh scars over your ears, a mangy pelt gone at least a moon without a wash. What a caring system of cats you live by! Reminds me of a certain Clan that crashed and burned." The last part of Flameheart's statement was low, more to himself than to the rogue.

Icestar held his head high. "You may be a stranger to these forests, but you ran into the wrong territory, chased the wrong kits, and broke through the wrong camp," he added, giving the rogue a look of utter disapproval.

"Those kits wouldn't have filled me up as much as a rabbit would've," the rogue snarled. Without a second to waste, he sprang up from his spot and leaped towards Icestar's position. However, he had no time to grab the leader, for the MoonClan warriors were quicker. Goldsun pinned down him down effortlessly, and Sharpfang stepped down on his hindpaws. Flameheart hissed at him a warning.

After a few heartbeats of observation, Icestar gave a curt nod. "Don't let this rogue out of your sight at all costs," he told Goldsun and Flameheart. "Switch places with a reliable and patient cat when you get tired. Sharpfang, come with me."

Icestar abruptly turned and began his way toward the medicine

den. Sharpfang trotted to keep up with his leader's movements. "What do you plan to do, Icestar?"

He took a deep breath, his tone aggravated. "I plan on giving the rogue some time."

"He won't talk," Sharpfang stated.

Icestar finally began to pace himself as he got closer to the medicine den. "I figured, Sharpang." He finally turned his head to look at his deputy. "What do you propose we do?"

"Let's leave him without food until he cracks. A starving cat is a desperate cat." Sharpfang spoke with no thought or hesitation whatsoever, as if he had already been deciding punishments since the short time they had captured the rogue tom. "Water is an exception, that is, if you'd like him alive."

Icestar thought of it for a moment, before stoping in front of the medicine den. "Alright, Sharpfang. You should take charge of the rogue for the time that he's held here."

"Even if I wasn't allowed, I have quite a few things to say to that invader," snarled Sharpfang as he stalked away, clearly as angry about it as Icestar.

For a moment, Icestar watched his deputy pad to the wreckage. Lilyclaw, Rainwhisker, Shadowheart, and Volefur were all out at the moment, collecting fresh, sturdy and flexible sticks and branches to cover up the mess. The elders, Blackpaw and Redsky were helping each other weave it back in place, but this time more securely than it must've been before. Icestar had been told by Sagepelt that Ravenkit was the one who made the opening toward the back because there was a weak point to the camp's walls, which had allowed the rogue's crash entering to be successful. The leader gave a deep sigh. His daughter was always so reckless!

Finally, he took his eyes off the mess and decided to visit his family.

He turned to the medicine den and fit through the entrance easily, immediately spotting his two kits bundled by each other in what

looked like sleep. Skypelt rested on one of the makeshift nests, his eyes in pain, obviously unable to get a wink of rest. Icestar's mate and the Clan medicine cat were talking softly, close by as well. His ears pricked in their direction to hear their conversation.

"—they will be fine, you don't have to worry. Having a hurt kit is better than a sick kit since young ones tend to heal pretty quickly," Sweetheart informed the queen.

"How long will it take Dewkit's wounds to at least go away?" Silverleaf asked. "And what about those nasty thorns stuck on Ravenkit's pelt?"

"Thorns are quite easy to take off, and Dewkit will be just fine in about a moon. There will be no scarring, don't worry," the medicine cat informed. Her ear snapped toward's Icestar's direction, and she turned to meet his gaze. "Oh, look who's here."

"Icestar," Silverleaf meowed. "It's great you're here. Anything about the rogue?"

He couldn't help but let a growl escape his throat. "Wouldn't tell me a thing, that stubborn, mangy, piece of fox—"

Silverleaf cleared her throat. "The kits are awake."

Icestar's head snapped in the direction of his son and daughter. Their round eyes stared at him with surprise. "Oh, whoops." His ears flattened with embarrassment, and Skypelt rolled his eyes, clearly amused.

"Icestar, were you going to curse?" Ravenkit gasped, tilting her head. Dewkit didn't seem to want to say anything. He looked too ashamed and hurt from his actions today to make any type of association whatsoever.

Silverleaf heaved a sigh. "Your father tends to do that a lot, Ravenkit. I don't expect you to copy him." Her tail flicked with annoyance. "But that's not the point. It's good he's here now, because we're going to discuss your punishment." Her chin held high and she sat down by Skypelt, neatly wrapping her tail around

her paws.

"Oh, I knew it," mumbled Dewkit with great sadness. His white fur stuck out on the ends and his dark blue eyes rounded with fear.

Ravenkit immediately burst up on her tiny paws. "Please, don't punish Dewkit! It was all my fault, Icestar and Silverleaf. He didn't do anything wrong . . . But *I* did." Her head hung with shame, and her shoulders slumped down. Dewkit seemed to shrink as well, hiding behind his black-furred sister. "I was the one who made that back exit and escaped the camp in the first place."

"It may have not been his idea, but he did follow you out of the camp, Ravenkit," Icestar meowed gently, crouching down at eye-level with the kits. "The warrior code says not to allow kits out of camp for a reason. Young ones like you with no training can't defend themselves, and can even get hurt."

"But if we *knew* how to defend ourselves—" Ravenkit protested.

"You didn't," Icestar cut off.

Silverleaf nodded with agreement. "And you are far from six moons old, our kits. We have no choice but to punish you."

"But the only reason Dewkit followed me is because we wanted to stop me from leaving!" Ravenkit protested.

"Is this true, Dewkit?" questioned Silverleaf, this time turning to her son. "You only wanted to help your sister, and nothing more?"

Dewkit seemed smaller than he always was. "I-I mean, I was a bit curious about the forest." The young kit gulped. "But p-please don't revoke our apprentice ceremony! Four moons is much too long to wait!"

Icestar gave a small nod of consideration. "We'll have to see. You two put yourselves in a life-and-death situation, and only StarClan knows what would have happened if you didn't make it to the Clan in time." He took a deep breath and thought about Lightkit, his daughter who died two moons before. Of course, his kits didn't know about their sister who never survived, but someday he'd tell

them. Perhaps soon.

He didn't want to lose another kit.

He exchanged a glance with his mate. "Well, Silverleaf?"

"I'll stay here a bit longer," she mewed, laying down beside Skypelt. "I'd better watch the kits. They'll be here for a few days. Besides, I'd like to spend some time with my father." She purred and looked at Skypelt, and he purred in return.

"Be good, kits," the leader meowed.

"We'll be *very* good," Ravenkit said. "So good that even StarClan won't seem so perfect anymore."

"I hope so." Icestar dipped his head to Skypelt and touched his mate's nose with his own. "I'll see you both in the morning. Take care with that wound, Skypelt."

"I will," meowed the white-furred tom. His broken paw was properly wrapped and had been treated by Sweetheart. He hoped that he would heal soon, especially since he was Bloodpaw's mentor.

Icestar crouched out the entrance, and looked around the camp in search for Amberpaw. Immediately, he saw her staring at the strange mangy yellow-furred rogue from the apprentice's den out boredom and curiosity. Bloodpaw happen to be nearby, within the den on his nest, curled up in a scarlet bundle of sleep. Immediately, Icestar padded across the camp to get to her.

"Amberpaw," he meowed, nodding down to his apprentice.

Her ears turned before her head, and she looked up. "Yes, Icestar?" she asked, tilting her head.

"I think you'd better get some rest now," he advised, before looking up at the sun, which was just halfway through the horizon of trees. "Night shall befall soon, and we have a big day tomorrow."

"Enlighten me," yawned the apprentice she-cat. She blinked up

sleepily, or out of boredom, or both.

Icestar purred. "Well, we've been training nonstop for this ever since the Dark Battle was over."

"My warrior assessment!" Amberpaw suddenly exclaimed. "But wait, what about that rogue? Would we have to stay here to watch him? It's completely fine if we have to wait a few days or so."

He looked down to the rogue one last time. "One interruption shouldn't stop such a big event, my apprentice. You've worked long moons for this, you and Blackpaw both."

"Shouldn't I train one last time before I sleep? I mean, I can't fail this test," insisted Amberpaw, her tail flicking with excitement. The boredom seemed to go away, although she still seemed a bit tired. She probably overworked herself today with helping Skypelt from under that tree.

"The last sort of preparation you need now," Icestar advised, "is sleep. Only a complete night's rest can have you fully aware and energetic for tomorrow's events."

"What's a warrior assessment like?" asked Amberpaw with her newfound eagerness.

"I never experienced one . . ." he tried to explain, but her bubbly and colorful ways already cut him off with yet more questions.

"How long does it last? What will be on the assignment?"

"Woah, Amberpaw, slow down!" Icestar cut off, purring with amusement. "You'll find out in the morning. The sooner you sleep, the sooner that time will come. Let's say you do pass the assessment; you'll be very tired sitting vigil in camp after your warriors assessment if you don't get the sleep you need *now*."

At the mention of become a warrior, she gave a curt nod. "Yes, Icestar!"

"Off to your nest," he ordered, as Blackpaw slipped by him to curl up next to Bloodpaw. Volefur must have had a word to his own

apprentice as well. After seeing Amberpaw take a place in the third nest, he nodded to himself and padded softly to the leader's den with a yawn.

Who knew having kits could get a cat so tired.

* * *

A lake of fire swept the forest, as dark gray smoke engulfed the trees around him. Icestar's lungs burned; his wounds stung. Yet, somehow, his eyes were wide against the painfully hot air, searching for something, some*one*. His ears wouldn't work; not a single click of the flames or croak of the trees could be heard. Flames began to lick at Icestar's paws, and he leaped with surprise at the burning touch. He could not stay here any longer.

He began to run through the burning forest, inaudibly calling out a name from his mouth. Who was he calling? Who had he lost to the hungry fires? He couldn't recall, but his heart insisted on using the last of his breath to yowl out a name from the top of his lungs.

". . . *star*. Dewstar!"

Icestar took a gasp of air laced with smoke and coughed. Why was he calling Dewstar? Where was his brother?

His ears twitched. He began to hear.

The wildfire crackled, laughing through a feast of trees, bushes and shrubbery. The wind blew hotly and madly, causing a painfully high and eerie screech to circle his ears. As he ran, the dry grass and leaves shriveled and broke underpaw, crunching loudly. Suddenly, he heard a voice, too. The voice a cat painfully familiar; the voice of the one he had called, Dewstar.

Icestar skidded to a halt over a cliff-edge and looked down, to recognize that this was the ditch that was located deep within DarkClan territory. *I'm in DarkClan?* he thought. *Why am I here?*

As he looked closer down the ditch, he noticed a grown white-furred cat clinging to the cliff-side, his pelt brushing in all directions from the wind. It was Dewstar. *I can never forget those*

*dark blue eyes*, he thought, looking in the depth of his brother's expression.

"L-let me help you," Icestar croaked out, lowering down his paw.

Dewstar stared at his brother's paw for a moment, and shook his head slowly. Then he murmured, "It's better this way . . ." before he let go and began plunging down into the dark pit. Icestar yowled after his brother, his eyes wide.

*Why didn't you let me help you, Dewstar*? he thought, collapsing to the ground. *So what you wouldn't be accepted? So what you were hurt and injured?*

"It didn't have to be like this!" Icestar yowled down the bottomless, dark pit. It felt as if his heart had broke all over again. Dewstar did so many things to wrong Icestar's life, but his love and longing for his brother never went away. He sunk to the ground, and whispered, "It didn't have to be like this, stupid furball."

"Oh, it did," hissed a new voice. Icestar whirled around with surprise. He was supposed to be alone in this moment. However, a new cat stood over him with all his might, standing tall—and proud. "This was all supposed to happen, Icestar. However, I was quite disappointed that you didn't destroy as prophesied." The newcomer's voice grew louder, and he walked into the MoonClan leader's eyeshot.

Icestar's eyes widened as he noticed the tom's familiar features. "Shard!"

The gray Twilight Forest tom smiled. "It's been two long moons, Icestar. Two moons of peace that'll disrupt soon enough."

"You are no ally of mine!" hissed Icestar, whirling around as he lashed out his forepaw. He half-expected his claws to rake through the traitor's fur and flesh, but his paw went right through the spirit-cat's body, as if he wasn't there in the first place. How Icestar *wished* he could feel the blood of Shard on his claws . . . Dewstar's pain was caused by him. *Every* cat's pain was caused by him! *And I thought he was my friend for moons upon seasons, from apprenticeship to*

*leadership*.

Shard shook his head with disapproval. "Now, now, Icestar. I was simply guiding you and your brother. Each of your actions determined how I would guide you; and evidently Dewstar's heart was too dark."

"His heart wasn't dark. It never was," Icestar spat in response.

"But though that prophecy was fulfilled, more trouble shall befall the forests of the Clans," Shard said as he flicked his tail. "This is a warning, Icestar."

"I shouldn't trust anything you say," Icestar murmured softly.

Shard snarled in return. "Stop pretending like everything's okay and peaceful, Icestar! Don't you see it? The crumbling forests, the uprooting trees, the underground Twoleg construction, and that rogue who happened to stumble by your Clan. They're all tying together for yet a new prophecy, a new fate for *all* the Clans."

# Chapter Six

**Hey guys. I'm re-editing the entire book of Icetail's Enemy. Yes, again. I'm hoping to get rid of 80%-100% of all mistakes this time, and to reword certain confusing things. So yes, this chapter is shorter than usual. I hope it won't be a problem ^^**

A ray of light poked through the nursery and touched Dewkit's white fur, waking him instantaneously. He shivered at the cool morning air, and noticed that the warmth of his mother was gone. After a moment of looking around, he realized that she was missing, and the only cats that were here was his sister Ravenkit, Sagepelt, Swiftbreeze, and their kits.

Where had Silverleaf gone?

Dewkit stuck his head out the nursery and observed the scenery of the Clan. Dawn had only just come, so the sun was barely a peak over the trees, and the camp was mostly asleep except for the two warriors, Flameheart and Nightrose, who were guarding the rogue prisoner. He looked around, and noticed that Silverleaf's fresh paw prints led to the leader's den. His parents must be talking.

He padded out into the camp, his pads being chilled from the fresh morning air. As he silently walked across the clearing, birds chirped high in the trees, indicating that newleaf was here, and the weather would soon warm with new prey scuttling across the forest. As Dewkit looked at the tips of the trees, his pelt bristled with excitement, remembering the run through the forest he had. *I can't wait to be an apprentice! I just hope Silverleaf and Icestar aren't talking about revoking the ceremony.*

As he got closer to the den, he could hear his parent's voices speaking softly. The scent of four cats could be made out; his father, mother, the medicine cat Sweetheart, and the deputy Sharpfang. Whatever they were talking about, it must be important for all of them to be gathered.

Dewkit peeked his head inside, and noticed the four of them sitting by Icestar's nest as they spoke in their hushed voices.

"—you had a dream, Icestar?" questioned Sharpfang, his pelt bristling with alarm. "I thought they stopped two moons ago, when the Dark Battle was over."

Icestar took a deep breath. "They did . . . but one suddenly came back. The cat who always visited me in the past when I had such dreams, he told me something alarming."

"I thought this was all over," growled Silverleaf. "Clan life was supposed to be peaceful since DarkClan is gone. What's going to happen, Icestar?"

Icestar was silent for a moment. Finally, the leader murmured, "Shard told me there will be destruction . . . though I do not know if it is true. However, he mentioned things that made sense."

Dewkit leaned in a bit, more and more curious as to what they were speaking about. Dreams? Destruction? This was something serious! If he were to be caught, he could get in even bigger trouble. However, his eyes held on the image of the warrior queen, the deputy, the medicine cat and the leader.

*I shouldn't be listening to this!*

"Whatever it is, it might have to do with physical destruction. We have got to keep a close eye on that rogue, and the Twolegs in the forest," Icestar said.

The medicine cat's tail flicked. "If it has to do with Twolegs," Sweetheart growled, "I'm afraid the situation will be out of our control."

Sharpfang cut in. "We must also inform the other leaders! Like that rogue said, if there's another group of cats somewhere nearby the territories I'd say that they are dangerous, considering with what this one tried to do to your kits."

"I just wanted our Clan to live peacefully," murmured Silverleaf with sadness, her eyes trailing down to her paws. Icestar pressed to

her side in a comforting gesture and she rested her head on his shoulder.

Sweetheart looked in between all three cats. "I will be going to the Night Flower soon. I may find my answers there," she murmured, her gaze flickering in between them. "StarClan will surely visit my dreams, and they shall tell me the truth. However, it is in a few day's time, so we will just have to be patient."

"I'll be as patient as I possibly can—but please don't share this information with any cat," Icestar murmured, looking in between his companions. "I'll talk to Flameheart and the others when the time comes. For now it's best not to worry anybody."

"I especially hope the kits don't find out," Silverleaf piped up.

*Oops*, Dewkit thought, his fur bristling with fear. He took a step back, but without realizing it, his paw met a crumpled leaf and a small twig, immediately cracking into the bare newleaf air. He took a sharp inhale. *Way to mess things up!*

Even though the meeting of cats was out of his sight, Icestar seemed to hear. "Looks like some cat was already listening in on us!" The leader growled and cursed under his breath as he stalked toward the entrance of his den. Dewkit had no time to run, for his father's dark gray fur was already made out as he stepped outside. His amber eyes widened. "Dewkit! Why are you out of the nursery?" Fearfully, the small kit's mouth opened to respond, but Icestar spoke again, cutting him off. "Wait, never mind. Did you hear?"

"Wh-what?" Dewkit shrunk back, his blue eyes wide.

"You know what I'm talking about," Icestar softly growled, looking down to his son. "You did hear us, didn't you?" Silverleaf and Sharpfang stepped outside the den as well, and the moment his mother spotted him, her eyes widened with horror.

Gulping, he nodded, knowing it was no use to lie to his father, the Clan leader. "I-I didn't mean to. I was looking for Silverleaf, since she had gone . . ."

"Did you forget how I told you not to leave the den because you were in trouble?" she asked. "You disobeyed me, Dewkit."

"I'm sorry!" he squeaked.

A new voice arose behind all five of them. "What's going on here?" questioned the warrior, Flameheart. Dewkit whirled around to see Flameheart and Amberpaw trailing up the path, their tails flicking in greeting.

"Good morning, Flameheart," Sharpfang grunted.

Dewkit looked up to both of his parents, who exchanged a glance of silent words. Though none of them had actually said anything, they looked as if they were speaking to each other. Finally, Silverleaf meowed, "I was just taking Dewkit back into the medicine den."

Dewkit gulped, and then looked at his father. Icestar looked at the group of cats, before motioning toward Dewkit. "Let me have a word with my son before that."

Trembling with fear, Dewkit followed Icestar as he led him to the farther edge of camp. Dewkit always hated getting in trouble; it was his dream to become an apprentice, yet alone a warrior. However, he somehow always messed things up, no matter how careful he tried to be. Why was did he always have to ruin things for himself?

Finally, Icestar stopped a few paces away from the camp entrance, his amber eyes boring into Dewkit's blue ones. Finally, he said, "Dewkit, I don't want you to fear."

"I-I'm not in trouble?" stammered the kit.

"No, you're not. It's beyond our power to restrict words we say from certain cat's ears, after all." Icestar paused, looking as if he were searching for the right things to say. "However, Silverleaf might punish you for disobeying her. And . . ." Dewkit's heart stopped. "I don't want you repeating the things you heard to *anyone*. Not even Ravenkit."

Dewkit couldn't imagine hiding anything from his dear sister, who always knew everything that went through his mind. Yet, for some

reason, this was not a gossiping matter to talk about, and he knew his father was right even though it meant keeping a secret. Finally, he nodded. "I won't tell a soul."

Icestar nodded with approval, but a certain look shone in his eyes that Dewkit often saw as his father looked at him, but could never determine. It always seemed like a look of loss, though he was never fully sure. Whatever it was, Dewkit always wondered about it but could never quite bring it up to any cat. After all, he knew some of MoonClan's dark past before the great battle, which his father and older Clanmates had been a part of. He never wanted to bring up the bad memories, no matter how curious he always was.

"Go on, it looks like your mother wants you," said Icestar, pushing Dewkit's haunches with his nose.

Dewkit looked forward and saw Silverleaf, waiting for him patiently. For a moment, he was scared of what she would think of him . . . until she noticed a look of sadness in the depths of her light blue eyes. *She's not mad?* thought Dewkit, slowly padding forward.

When he finally got to her, she motioned her nose to the fresh-kill-pile. "Go pick out something for you and your sister to share."

Her voice slightly trembled.

"Mama, are you scared?" murmured Dewkit, tilting his head slightly.

Silverleaf shook her head. "Of course I'm not. Now, don't bring anything up once we get inside the nursery, okay? Some things are better left unsaid." And with that, she made her way to the nursery as Dewkit padded to the pile, wondering what she meant by that.

He stared at the pile, wondering what to choose. He was impressed at the amount of prey waiting for him. Several pieces of fresh-kill lay about, probably left from the night patrol. Nosing one of the voles, he noticed that there was still a bit of warmth left in its dead body, and picked out the fattest one in his jaws before clambering back to the nursery. There, he saw Silverleaf waking Ravenkit. Sagepelt, Swiftbreeze and all the other kits were awake as well.

"Here, let's share this vole," Dewkit mumbled as he dropped it at his awoken sister's paws.

She blinked the sleep out of her eyes and looked up at him. "You're up rather early . . ." She gave a great yawn, before looking around the den. "Berrykit, Shadekit, want to share with us?"

"No," Shadekit said as he stood up himself. "Berrykit and I will share our *own* prey." With that, he padded outside the den.

"Thanks anyway," Berrykit put in, trying to cover her brother's blunt coldness.

Ravenkit shrugged and turned to Dewkit. "Ah well. So what'cha doing up this early?" she questioned as she took the first bite of the vole.

Dewkit froze, and looked up at his mother. She gave him a long, pleading stare. Finally he mewed, "I-I just wanted to say hello to Icestar. You know, before he left for Amberpaw's assessment."

For a moment, she glared at him suspiciously. Nervously Dewkit took the next big bite, hoping that his sister would question him no further. She knew that he was bad with lies, but just this once, he should get away with it.

*After all*, he thought. *Whatever this "destruction" thing is, it's so important! I wonder what it all really means?*

# Chapter Seven

Icestar unsurely looked back to the camp with a deep sigh, eyeing the rogue tom who had been captured just the other day. The stranger, who hadn't eaten ever since his arrival, looked listless and untroubled as he dozed about under the guard of Petalwing and Crowflight. He didn't want to leave camp without his eye on that rogue, but he knew that he couldn't waste time.

*Today is Amberpaw and Blackpaw's big day after all*, he thought as he turned his gaze over to the two apprentices eating their share from the fresh-kill-pile. If they passed this ceremony, no longer will they be apprentices. They will become full warriors of MoonClan!

He swiftly took a glance at the medicine den, where Dewkit and Ravenkit were having their wounds checked up by Sweetheart. When those two finally have their warrior ceremonies, he would truly enjoy it as much as he would enjoy Amberpaw and Blackpaw's. *And Bloodpaw,* thought Icestar as he looked at Skypelt, the scarlet apprentices' injured mentor in the medicine den. *Bloodpaw will need a new mentor soon if Skypelt's injuries are bad.*

Icestar's ear flicked as he noticed Volefur padding through the camp's clearing, his white-and-brown pelt glinting under the sun with his sister at his side. Dawnstripe must be the one who would accompany him to assess Blackpaw. The leader took a deep breath as a faint memory of her late apprentice, Goldenpaw, flashed in his mind. *Today should be meant for Goldenpaw, too*, Icestar thought sadly. *If only she could have become a warrior*.

"Good morning," Volefur greeted as he sat by Icestar's side. "It's quite warm today, isn't it?"

Icestar mumbled an agreement as Dawnstripe said, "Warmer than usual, that's what it is. New-leaf is finally here! Prey should be returning, and Amberpaw and Blackpaw might have a good hunt today." Her tone seemed cheerful, and Icestar purred, knowing that he should not think about her dead apprentice any longer. Today

was a day meant for the living.

Flameheart, who was supposed to accompany Icestar, arrived at his side a few moments later. "Hello," greeted the rusty-orange tom with a dip of the head. "Is it time to go?"

Icestar looked up to the sun, squinting at its brilliant light. It had finally risen over the tree-tips, and the prey should be scuttling around the forest by now. "You're right." In a slightly louder tone, he called, "Apprentices, it's time to go!"

Amberpaw gulped down the last of her vole from the center of the clearing and began to run up to the waiting cats. Blackpaw, who had already finished, followed closely by his sister's risen tail-tip. Icestar noticed as they got closer to the group that their fur was more neatly groomed than usual, probably to make a good impression to their mentors. *It's not about looks,* thought Icestar with amusement, *but skill and knowledge!*

He purred as Amberpaw reached his side. "Sorry I'm late!" she exclaimed, shaking out her muzzle from the last bits of prey that clung under her lip. "I'm ready now. This assessment is going to be great!" Her tail shook with excitement, and her neatly-groomed ginger pelt shone under the sun.

Blackpaw—who was usually indifferent about certain situations—looked excited for once, with some parts of his sleek black fur sticking upward. "Are we going now?"

"Yes," Flameheart purred, beginning to lead the group outside the camp. "Amberpaw, walk by me. I'll be helping Icestar assess you."

Excited, she padded by his side, and Icestar squeezed through the camp entrance after them, following closely behind. Dawnstripe and Volefur came next with Blackpaw as they began their travel through the MoonClan forest.

As he walked through the forest, slowly padding ahead of the group, he noticed that the trees were not as bare as they used to be, and the branches were becoming covered with green leaves. The snow was also long-gone, and the light brown dirt was now dark,

growing with fresh new undergrowth and plants of all sorts, as well as shrubbery and a few new bushes here and there. Padding up a slope, he swerved around a tree that had fallen long ago in their forest.

"Where is the assessment taking place?" asked Amberpaw with an edge of excitement in her voice.

Flameheart was the one to respond. "We'll be there soon, Amberpaw. Don't worry."

She padded quicker, her pelt brushing by Icestar. "So, care to tell me what the assessment is?" she questioned, leaning in close with curiosity.

"You'll find out when we get there." Icestar's ear flicked, signaling her to fall back. She did as so, and he noticed that they were closer than they seemed. The group was still traveling uphill. The grass seemed to become less moist, even crunchy and longer underpaw as they approached their destination. Finally, Icestar was the first to reach the top of the hill, and stopped walking, turning back to his patrol. All the cats stopped walking too.

"Amberpaw, Blackpaw, today you will take your official warrior assessments. If you do well in our eyes, you shall be granted your own warrior names." He dipped his head to Flameheart. "He and I will be assessing your skills, Amberpaw." Next, he looked at Volefur and Dawnstripe. "They will assess you, Blackpaw." Icestar met the two apprentice's nervous round eyes. "What this assessment actually is is an evaluation your skills in hunting. Make sure to keep up with what you were taught, because we won't be there to help you anymore, and every little move you make will be watched—and judged."

Amberpaw gave a small gulp, and Blackpaw stood perfectly still. Silently, Icestar gave them a reassuring nod before Dawnstripe—the most experienced mentor—spoke: "You may choose where you want to hunt, and by sunhigh meet back to this spot." And with that, she signaled for them to go, and they did, each padding to their opposite directions.

"Amberpaw and Blackpaw will do good," Flameheart murmured in Icestar's ear. "I am sure of it."

"So am I," agreed Icestar, waiting several heartbeats for the two apprentices to disappear through the undergrowth. When they were gone, the mentors dispersed with their partners by them, following the trail of their apprentices.

Of course, Icestar followed Amberpaw's trail. She hadn't gone far—unlike Blackpaw, who went into the direction of the destroyed cave of mosses. Instead, she went into the opposite way where MoonClan and CloudClan's territory met and ended.

*Interesting place to hunt*, thought Icestar, beginning to crouch low as he scented his apprentice nearby. Flameheart did the same, and began leading the way to her position, being the better tracker out of the two. As they walked, Flameheart slowly padded up to a nearby tree and hauled himself up as silently as a mouse. Icestar went next, gripping his claws tightly to the wood of the branches, making his way up into the cover of leaves and the tangle of twigs. Finally, he spotted his apprentice, who was hiding two mice under a bush.

Impressed, Icestar exchanged glances with Flameheart, who also had the same look in his eye. *After all, she caught her first prey already!* he thought, proud of her skills. He closely watched her as she continued her hunt, creeping low to the ground. Her posture was good, if not perfect, showing signs of experience and exercise. The way she crouched reminded Icestar of the special trick he taught her a few moons back that helped to perform silent, strong leaps.

Icestar watched closely as she inched up to a vole that munched on a nut in the plain sight of predators. He knew that prey-creatures only openly showed themselves when they thought they were safe. If she was not successful, he knew that the vole would be able to scurry off into an untraceable place.

After she was a fine way away from the vole, she stealthily leaped onto it before it had time to react. Then, she finished it off with a killing bite. Satisfied with herself, she brought it to where she had

hid her mice and buried it under the bush.

*Three pieces of prey!* thought Icestar, beyond proud of her skills and his fine teaching. *I wonder if her sister is watching her in StarClan.*

Icestar's paws were pressed to his chest, and Flameheart was right by him, his pelt brushing against his as they watched the ginger apprentice continue her hunt. A bit time had passed, and all Amberpaw had caught other than the two mice and the vole was a fat squirrel. She looked around for more prey, her jaws parted, smelling the air to find out where there would be more food to find. Icestar himself noticed a bird on a low tree branch, but Amberpaw had not seen it, for it was being awfully silent, perhaps searching the ground for worms.

Finally, however, she did notice something else—another vole that was nestled by a tree trunk. Amberpaw, seeming satisfied with herself and crouched down low enough for her belly fur to touch the ground. She hid in the undergrowth, hoping to be unseen. Icestar took notice of her tail twitching excitement, and her eyes too fixed upon the piece of live prey.

Flameheart leaned a bit closer, noticing her flaws in this particular hunt as well. He looked as if he wanted to tell her what she had at fault, but he stayed put, of course, and watched the rest of the hunt silently.

Finally, Amberpaw was close enough to take her leap. However, as she slowly pressed her forepaw to the ground, a twig crunched underpaw, and the vole immediately scurried within the trunk of the tree in complete fear. Icestar could almost hear her mumble a curse under her breath.

*I hope her hunt does not end up being lousy*, thought Icestar, noticing her struggle. *Four pieces of prey is good, but not enough for an outstanding assessment.*

He watched her as her tail flicked with annoyance. After looking around a bit more, though, she finally seemed to realize that the bird, particularly a starling, started to chirp lightly. *She noticed it,*

Icestar realized, pleased with her skill. Maybe her hunt would not turn out to be unsuccessful after all. His eyes followed her movement—she was definitely being more careful now than before; her hunt continued.

As Amberpaw approached the bird, Icestar noticed that she made sure to be aware of her surroundings. Her tail did not move this time, and even though her attention was fixed on the starling, she was also paying attention to her surroundings so that she would not step on another loud object. Finally, she was close enough to leap. She wiggled her haunches, and—

The bushes rustled.

Startled, the starling immediately took flight, soaring high through the air before Amberpaw could leap at it. Icestar's heart sunk—but he knew that it was not her fault that such an accident had happened. Who was nearby that ruined her hunt? Icestar leaned closer as Amberpaw crept by the bush to inspect. Flameheart's ears raised, trying to hear better what it was.

A heartbeat later, a rabbit sprawled out of the undergrowth, sprinting past the trees. Amberpaw didn't hesitate and shot after it, forcing her limbs to catch up to it. *She's so fast!* thought Icestar. Perhaps if she wasn't a MoonClan cat, she'd be having her apprentice ceremony in CloudClan for her incredible speed. That was how fast she seemed to be as she raced after the rabbit.

Icestar hoped she would get it. Her legs seemed to stretch out farther as she full-out sprinted. Finally, she raced out of the cover of trees, and Icestar and Flameheart tried to get closer to observe how she would handle this situation. On open moorland, she seemed to keep up with the rabbit, and was easily gaining on it. Amberpaw swerved from the side to cut the rabbit's route to CloudClan territory, and she leaped, tumbling down along with the rabbit in her grasp. As they stopped, the rabbit struggled against her grasp, but it could not escape, and she lunged her head down to give it a killing bite.

Satisfied, Icestar purred softly to himself. *It's nearly sunhigh, and she caught a good amount of prey*, he thought, pleased with his

apprentice. *Perhaps we should get going now to start the battle assessment.*

Icestar was just about to leap out of his spot on the tall branch as Amberpaw entered the forest, but he was stopped short when he heard another rustle in the bushes. *More prey?* The breeze whipped up a strange scent—one that Icestar had surely caught before. He simply could not remember what it was or where it came from, but he surely knew it from somewhere. Flameheart scented it as well, and his eyes narrowed at the bushes, as the rattling grew closer, meaning something was coming.

Amberpaw, down below on the ground, heard it too. However, she had no time to flee, as a cat emerged through the undergrowth. His pelt was a dark ginger color from Icestar's vantage point. He could not tell clearly, but the cat's paws were most likely white, and his body was covered in dark brown tabby stripes.

Flameheart tensed, and was about to leap down to the ground, but Icestar's tail gently touched his shoulder. Flameheart looked up and met his leader's eyes, to see his head slowly shake.

*I want to see what Amberpaw is going to do*, thought Icestar. *If this cat is hostile, we can jump down. Please understand this, Flameheart*.

As if he could read Icestar's mind, Flameheart settled down, watching the stranger intensely. He stared at Amberpaw with his light green eyes. Amberpaw gave a low growl, and her hackles raised as she pawed her rabbit protectively.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "You don't smell like any Clan I know of."

"Clans?" the rogue questioned. "I come from no Clan. My name is Jinx."

*Jinx?* thought Icestar, alarmed. *What kind of name is that? And he's a rogue, too! What if he has something to do with the one back in camp?*

Amberpaw growled out loud. "Leave this territory at once!"

"Not before you tell me who *you* are," the rogue said, his tail

flicking side by side. "You have such nice eyes."

Flameheart's claws unsheathed as his nose flared with annoyance.

"Get lost!" snarled Amberpaw once more, preparing to fight against him. "This is MoonClan territory. Strangers are *not* welcome here!" She backed up a bit, and pulled her catch behind her, as if his one and only goal was to snatch it away.

Jinx's green eyes trailed behind her and he saw the rabbit being pushed out of his reach. "Don't worry, little Clan cat. I am not here for your prey, and I was most certainly just messing with you." Icestar couldn't tell, but it was almost as if Jinx was purring. "However, I do have a serious question, now. If you answer it, I will leave."

"I'll make you leave anyhow," Amberpaw retorted.

Jinx seemed to shrug off the threat. "There is this cat I am searching for, you see, and he might be a part of your Clans." His eyes trailed around the forest, as if he would find the one he was seeking somewhere among the trees. "This cat I am talking about—he is destined to destroy, and that's what he's going to do if we don't stop him."

Icestar's heart seemed to stop. *This cat could not possibly be talking about me, could he?* thought the leader, his pelt bristling with alarm as memories flared into his mind. *If he is, how does he know about the prophecy, especially after it had been solved two moons ago?*

Amberpaw's head tilted, slightly with curiosity. "Listen, Jinx. I have no clue about this cat you speak of. One who destroys? *Here*? What nonsense!"

Jinx shrugged. "If you say so, *liar*."

"You don't believe me?" questioned Amberpaw, her pelt bristling with rage. "*You're* the one who came into *my* territory, rogue! Leave at once or things won't be good for you!"

Jinx turned around, making his leave. Before he disappeared out of the nearby border, however, he turned his head over his shoulder

once more. "I am not a rogue, little Clan cat. My name is Jinx—and I belong with a group of cats much more fearsome than the likes of you. Somewhere around, there resides the cat who will destroy. We won't stop hunting for him until he's dead. You should too, Clan-kitty, because he just might cause the destruction of all the Clans in his wake!"

And with that, Jinx disappeared through the undergrowth, his dark brown tail flicking out of sight. Amberpaw held her ground, clearly alarmed.

Icestar did not know if he should move. If this cat was searching for him—searching for Icestar who already *destroyed* DarkClan moons before, then he could still be lurking around. *This is bad! If Jinx is really looking for me, I could put MoonClan in danger! And why—rather—how does he know about such things?*

Flameheart nudged the leader's side, grasping the situation as much Icestar had. "Come on," he murmured, "We cannot leave Amberpaw alone any longer. We must regroup and return to camp."

Icestar hesitated for a moment, before giving a nod of understanding. "If that's what is best . . ."

The rusty-orange warrior leaped out of the tree branch, and landed stealthily by Amberpaw's side, startling her. "Don't worry, it's only us," Flameheart assured her, as Icestar landed on the ground as well.

"Why didn't you come out?" she asked, her tone a bit sharp.

Icestar dipped his head to his apprentice. "I'm sorry, Amberpaw. We didn't want to cut in your warrior assessment."

"Even with such an interruption?" she demanded, glancing over her shoulder as if Jinx was still lingering around. "He smelled like that cat we have in camp, Icestar! There's a whole group of them! Who knows what he could have done?"

"Let's not talk here," Icestar murmured sharply in her ear, his pelt bristling. "Who knows if that rogue is really gone?"

Amberpaw let out a shuddering breath, and Flameheart began leading the group back to the hill after Amberpaw retrieved all her prey, where they were supposed to meet Blackpaw and the others by sunhigh. As they walked through the forest, all their senses alert for Jinx or some other rogue, Icestar thought about the recent events throughout the past few days.

"We're going to have to bring this matter up to the Clan," he decided as he imagined about a possible future attack from this so-called group of cats. "Amberpaw, Flameheart, don't mention it at all to anyone. I am going to make an announcement soon enough."

He pushed past the two, beginning to lead them up front. He took a deep breath as memories from his dream flashed in his mind. *Shard was right*, he thought, his muscles tensing up. *Things are not over*. He held up his head, feeling the warm breeze brush by his ears. *The forest is changing . . .*

# Chapter Eight

**Fun fact: in case y ou have forgotten, Dawnstripe and Volefur were the younger brother and sister of Ripplefur (Silverleaf's mother). However, the two were born from a different litter than Ripplefur's. Therefore, Dawnstripe and Volefur are technically of DarkClan descent, and are also Dewkit and Ravenkit's great aunt and uncle.**

Ravenkit sat listlessly in the medicine den, allowing Sweetheart to run her gentle, bristled tongue over her wounds from the thorns that were stuck on her skin the previous day. Her pelt stunk from the poultice that had been rubbed on her scratches, and her raven-black fur was no doubt messy from the herbs and constant grooming.

Sweetheart's voice piped up between licks. "Does it hurt, Ravenkit?"

"Stings a bit," she admitted, "but I'm over it! After all, I'm going to be a warrior. They have worse wounds than *this*, right?" She absolutely did not want to admit that her muscles ached a bit from yesterday, or else Sweetheart would keep her in the medicine den for a while longer. *I just want to return to the camp!* she thought gloomily, her eyes trailing around the clearing. Since it was sunhigh, nearly every cat has returned from patrolling or hunting. There was so much more to do than to be in the medicine all day, especially with all those smelly herbs.

The medicine cat let out a sigh, slowly giving a nod of consideration. "If you say so."

"I'm sure—no more pain," Ravenkit tried to convince her. *Unlike Dewkit, I can come up with good stories and make them seem true!*

"You may go." Sweetheart dipped her head, and returned over Skypelt to massage his broken back leg. She prodded the warrior awake, and his eyes opened sleepily.

"Let's go, Dewkit!" Ravenkit exclaimed as she turned away from them, bounding outside of the medicine den.

Dewkit wobbled upwards, and Sweetheart shook her head quickly. "Oh no, not you, Dewkit!" she snapped, laying him back down as Ravenkit's mouth opened to protest. She had no time to say anything, for the medicine cat had already cut her off. "*He* took scratches worse than yours. He's in no condition to play, Ravenkit. The only place he's going is to the nursery."

"Tell Sweetheart you're fine!" Ravenkit pleaded to her brother.

Dewkit guiltily shook his head. "I-I can't. My wounds hurt."

Sweetheart herded Ravenkit outside her den, nosing her out into the open. "And since you're not hurt anymore, you can do something else. Perhaps play with the other kits?"

Having no choice but to listen, Ravenkit gloomily walked away. *The other kits don't play!* she thought with a deep sigh. *They're four moons older than me, they're twice as big, and they never* want *to play with me*. Her tail drooped when she spotted them walking to the warrior's den side-by-side. Shadekit—well, he never even played with her before. He was always the serious of the two, not to mention the meaner one. Berrykit, however, use to go along with Ravenkit's games, but had stopped only a few days ago. After all, she was close to becoming an apprentice. *She doesn't have time for kit games*! Last but not least, Smokekit was still barely out of the nursery, so he couldn't especially do anything fun.

What is there to do? Every cat was too busy to talk or play by the looks of it. She did not want to hear the elders' tales. She especially didn't want to get stuck with the senior warriors and their lectures. She ran all out of schemes—Silverleaf was keeping a close eye on her by the camp entrance where she was speaking to Dropeyes.

*Being a kit can be so boring!* thought Ravenkit, observing the camp. *There's nothing to do, nowhere to go* . . . She searched for a warrior to play with—but those who were in camp seemed too busy to be bothered. Bloodpaw was on apprentice duties, and he was mean, so Ravenkit decided to avoid him. The other kits still clearly did not

want her company.

"Is there nothing to do?" she hissed under her breath, stalking through the clearing.

A deep voice of a cat cleared his throat. Her ears pricked, and her head turned to find out who had done it, and if they were trying to call her attention. *Does some cat want to play?* she thought with excitement. But, all she could see was . . . the rogue tom, laying down by the spot he was confined to. Shrugging, she turned away, but his throat cleared once more. *He's the one who's calling me?* she thought with confusion, tilting her head. Nervously, she took a step toward the tom. Those who were guarding him weren't around at the moment . . .

"*You*, little prey," he growled.

"I-I'm not prey," Ravenkit corrected him, her kit-fur bristling with anger and fear. "What do you want?"

"You're an apprentice, right? Go fetch me some fresh meat." His yellow eyes blinked, hunger obvious to his posture.

Ravenkit shook her head. "You're getting me confused. I'm a kit. Not an apprentice, not yet." She backed away. "And why should I get you something to eat? You're our prisoner!"

The tom growled, slowly standing up. "Because, little prey, I'll eat you whole of you don't get me a bite of real, dead meat!"

Ravenkit shrieked with fear, and the familiar orange pelt of Dropeyes stood protectively over her. "Back off, mongrel! Get back down or I'll have our warriors shred yours ears off!"

Hissing, the rogue laid back down, his gaze still hostile. Dropeyes padded up to him, followed by Crowflight. "We can't keep one eye off this cat without him starting something, can we?" muttered the black-furred tom, taking his respective guard position by the rogue.

"You're right," said Dropeyes, taking her own spot as well. "Remember, rogue. You won't get one piece of prey unless you talk. And, you have no right to threaten any of us anymore, especially

the kits. We can take away your water for that!"

The rogue spat. "Go ahead. I'll die and you'll never get a word from my mouth!"

"Ravenkit, go. You shouldn't stay near this cat," Dropeyes said, nudging the small kit's rump to the opposite direction after she shot a glare to the matted rogue's body. "Icestar will be getting back in camp soon."

"He takes long," she mumbled with frustration, padding away. She sat in the clearing, intently staring at the camp entrance and wondering what time her father would get back and if Amberpaw passed her warrior assessment. She wondered if they were taking long because something might have happened—or maybe the assessment was not even finished?

She shook her head when she saw the familiar rusty orange pelt of Flameheart slip through the camp entrance, followed by an eager Amberpaw and Blackpaw. Next came Volefur and Dawnstripe, followed lastly by Icestar. Each one carried a few pieces of prey, most likely caught by the apprentices. *They caught so much!* she thought, her belly growling with hunger even though she had eaten not too long ago.

Eagerly, she bounded up to meet them. Amberpaw was the first cat she approached.

"Well, how was it?" asked Ravenkit, her pelt trembling with excitement. "It looks like you did amazingly!"

Flameheart purred. "Let her have space, Ravenkit."

Amberpaw shook her head. "No, it's fine. But you're right, I'm sure I did good. We also—" she suddenly paused when her eyes trailed around the camp. Ravenkit followed her gaze to the rogue—and Amberpaw's mouth clamped shut. "We also . . ."

"Caught a rabbit!" Ravenkit exclaimed, once she saw Dawnstripe carrying a fat rabbit in her jaws. "I've never tasted one before!" Her heart beat with excitement and her mouth watered even more.

"Icestar told me that they're hard to catch, and they're so fast that even CloudClan warriors push to keep up with them. He said that they're dangerous too, but *tasty*." Her tongue swiped over her mouth.

"This is no time to eat," Silverleaf said with amusement. "Go on and get your brother; bring him to the clearing. Looks like Icestar has an announcement to make."

Amberpaw and Blackpaw bounded side-by-side together with the rest of the patrol, dropping off the prey they had caught as Ravenkit looked up to the Moonrock. This must be his first meeting in a while; she always felt proud to see her father above the whole Clan, even though he always acts as equal as the other cats. Her father's qualities deemed admirable to her eyes, and she would someday like to be just like him.

Finally, the leader called: "All cats of MoonClan—gather around the Moonrock for a Clan meeting!"

She quickly bounded to the medicine den to see her brother awake, his pelt treated with more herbs than yesterday.

"Come on," she meowed to him. "It's time for a meeting!" She was excited—if Amberpaw and Blackpaw passed the assessment, this would be the first time she could see a warrior's ceremony! Dewkit stood to his paws and she hustled him by Silverleaf, who was waiting toward the center of the camp with the rest of the Clan. Finally, Icestar went on.

"Today marked the warrior assessments of Amberpaw and Blackpaw —two young, heroic apprentices of our Clan." Icestar paused as the Clan looked to the two apprentices, and every cat made a circle around them so that they could sit in the middle of the clearing. "Amberpaw has done exceedingly well with her assessment, and according to Volefur, Blackpaw did his part just as good. So on this fine day, they will officially become warriors!"

The Clan erupted in meows of excitement. Ravenkit joined in, her voice a mixture of purrs and excitement just like her friends.

Icestar raised his dark-gray muzzle high and began, "I, Icestar, leader of MoonClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down upon this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend her as a warrior in her turn." As he recited the traditional words, he looked down to meet his apprentice's gaze. "Amberpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your own life?"

Amberpaw trembled with excitement. "I do!"

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Amberpaw, from this moment on, you shall be known as Amberwind. StarClan honors your incredible swiftness in both your paws and mind alike, and as well as your whole-hearted devotion to your Clan. We welcome you as a full warrior of MoonClan!"

"Amberwind! Amberwind!" the Clan chanted, their choruses raised high above the trees. Ravenkit chanted as if chanting for her own warrior assessment.

Amberwind clambered up the Moonrock and Icestar rested his muzzle upon her head, while she gave a respective lick to his shoulder. Then, she leaped down by her brother, giving him an encouraging look.

Icestar continued on with the ceremony. After the first part was finished, he exchanged a supportive and happy look with the black-furred tom. "Blackpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even with your own life?"

"I do," Blackpaw spoke, his voice louder than Ravenkit had ever heard.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Blackpaw, you shall now be known as Blacksun. StarClan honors your impeccable patience and your skill in battle, and we welcome you as a full warrior of MoonClan."

The Clan chanted loudly for Blacksun. Ravenkit joined in, admiring the young warrior's new name. As he padded up to Icestar to

exchange the final part of the ceremony, her heart beat quickly with excitement. *So this is what it's like becoming a warrior!* she thought, happiness spiking her pelt. Someday, it would be *her* name called throughout the Clan—and she would also someday be her own father's deputy.

*First I'll become an apprentice*, she thought with determination. *I'll be the best apprentice there is. And after becoming a warrior, I'll surely earn the deputy position someday!*

Her tail flicked with happiness at her imaginative thoughts, and Amberwind and Blacksun basked within the congratulations of their Clanmates. Ravenkit went to join them, however, unbeknownst to the whole Clan, a pair of eyes glinted from high on one of the oak trees.

Someone was watching the Clan.

For a moment, Ravenkit's pelt spiked with a weird feeling, and a leaf fell upon her head. She looked up, but there was nothing in sight. She shrugged. *Must have been my imagination.*

**Let me know if there are any mistakes. I probably made a lot.**

# Chapter Nine

**UGH, how long has it been since I've last posted? Since the summer, perhaps? Maybe even May or June? I can't remember; all I know is that I'm utterly upset with myself for not doing what I love. Most of you know why I've been off Wattpad but I really want to make my return. I don't know how many people will be reading this because I might have lost some people by foolishly not publishing.**

**P.S let me know if there are any errors.**

**P.P.S **@Lilsis365 is a new writer and her books need a little attention. Go check out her Warriors book and her account! :)****

The sun peaked over the tips of the oak trees, and the wind stilled. Not a single breeze traveled through the air of MoonClan territory, so it was not cold. Just by the feel of it, Icestar knew that the first wave of humidity of the new-leaf season would begin soon. At long last, all traces of leaf-bare seemed to be gone, and the season of prey had finally arrived.

The MoonClan leader led Shiningmoon, Crowflight, Flameheart and Amberwind through the familiar tangle of the undergrowth. As the first border patrol of the day, everything has yet to be discovered. He was a bit weary to encounter more rogues, but the daily duties of the Clan could not be stopped by meager threats.

As he led the patrol closer to CloudClan borders, Flameheart trotted up to his side, straying a bit from the group. "How was your sleep?" questioned the warrior, his voice a bit low. Icestar had told Flameheart about his dream the previous day, especially because of the encounter they'd witnessed during Amberwind's warrior assessment.

Icestar's recalled the rogue Jinx's troubling words. *Somewhere around, there resides the cat who will destroy. We won't stop hunting for*

*him until he's dead. You should too, because he just might cause the destruction of all the Clans in his wake.* Somehow, these words had to connect to Icestar's dream . . .

He turned to Flameheart, who was looking for an answer. "No dreams. No voices, no visions, *nothing*." He took a swift glance over his shoulder at Amberwind, but she could not hear their conversation. After all, she was too busy talking to Shiningmoon and Crowflight, her eyes sparkling as she indulged on a hunt she recently had. Thankfully, the new warrior hadn't spoken about their encounter at all, only leaving Icestar with questioning looks. The leader sighed, murmuring, "But something has been bugging my mind lately. I have the troubling suspicion that . . ."

"Go on, Icestar," encouraged Flameheart.

He took a deep breath. "Well, the rogue we have prisoner in camp must have something to do with the one we encountered. And Jinx mentioned having come from a group of cats, like *our* rogue." Icestar looked ahead as they finally approached open land. CloudClan valleys were seen in the distance, still dark because the sun's rays have yet to touch their lands. "They're searching for the cat who destroyed with a bad intent, so I *know* they're out to kill me."

Flameheart stopped walking, his eyes quickly traveling down on to paws.

"Don't tell me you've been avoiding that thought, Flameheart?" Icestar questioned.

Crowflight's voice piped up, making the two toms jump with surprise. "Avoiding what thought?" he asked.

"N-nothing," Flameheart stammered, throwing a quick glance at Crowflight, who had Dropeyes and Amberwind on either side of him. Amberwind glanced at him suspiciously.

"Icestar was probably telling him important leader business," she said, quickly flashing her eyes to Icestar . "I don't think you should nose in. Anyway, Flameheart, now that we're here, let's race!"

Flameheart was startled for a moment, but relaxed when he realized Amberwind had saved their private discussion from their curious Clanmate. Icestar was secretly grateful to her, his fur flattening on his ends.

"Alright, why not?" Flameheart quickly stood up. "Last one to the border is a dead squirrel!" In an instant, he dashed from his spot.

"No fair!" Amberwind called, letting out a yowl of delight as she chased him. However, in no time, she was able to catch up to him and even passed him.

Icestar watched the two with amusement as they went on ahead. Crowflight padded up to his side, asking, "Is it okay to let them act like that? They can scare away the prey."

Icestar purred. "Why not? We should have fun once in a while, and there won't be a hunting patrol here anytime soon." He began to walk forward, followed by the other two warriors. Deep down, Icestar secretly hoped that Crowflight had already forgotten about Flameheart and Icestar's conversation earlier, and also hoped he hadn't overheard anything. *It wouldn't be good if rumors spread around the Clan*.

When Icestar finally reached Flameheart and Amberwind, he realized that they were not alone. For a brief moment, he thought there was a band of rogues on the other side of the border, until then he realized it was only a CloudClan patrol.

*I'm being delusional*! Icestar thought. *I should quit thinking about rogues, and focus on the patrol*.

"It's good to see you," meowed the familiar voice of Grassheart. Amberwind gave them a curt and official nod as Icestar reached by her side.

As if they were old friends, Grassheart and Icestar touched noses. "I hope you're doing well, Grassheart," he said sincerely, and looked over the tom's shoulder to see two more CloudClan cats—Smallfeather, a little calico she-cat, and Swallowfur, a tom with unusual markings all over his pelt. His fur was gray, his neck was

red, and his belly was white, along with his white paws and an oddly shaped patch over his eye. "As for your Clan," Icestar added, giving the two an acknowledging nod.

Grassheart took a step back into his own territory. "How are your kits, Icestar?"

"Oh, they're fine—"

"Ravenkit is a boisterous one. Quite a troublemaker, isn't she?" Crowflight cut in with a *mrrow* of laughter.

Flameheart purred. "And she doesn't even take it from any of her parents! Icestar and Silverleaf were never a cause for trouble." He gave Icestar a humorous shove. "And Dewkit's got a personality of his own too—the kit is scared of his own shadow!"

Grassheart's whiskers twitched. "That sounds like my own Flykit—"

Smallfeather stepped up in between her two Clanmates. "That sounds nice and all, but I think we should get to our own business," she said, casting a glance as Icestar and Grassheart. "The sun is about to pass over the trees, and Swiftstar wants us to mark the whole border along MoonClan before it becomes sun-high."

"We understand," Icestar said with a respectful dip of his head. "We will let you be on your way." He looked at Grassheart. "Well, if I see you at the gathering we'll be sure to talk then!"

Grassheart nodded with agreement, just as Swallowfur gave an exasperated sigh. "It's never been appropriate for two cats of different Clans to speak on good terms other than in gatherings anyway," he piped up, his gaze firmly on the MoonClan warriors. Amberwind narrowed her eyes, becoming clearly a bit annoyed. "Just because we fought one battle together, it does not mean that MoonClan and CloudClan are *friends*."

"No, we're not friends," Amberwind said quickly. "But there's nothing wrong with being on good terms!"

"There is!" snapped Swallowfur.

Grassheart gave a stern look of disapproval to his Clanmate. "Don't try and argue, Swallowfur. It's uncommon, sure, but not unheard of." He looked at Icestar and his Clanmates. "We best be on our way then."

As Grassheart led his Clanmates away, Amberwind let out a rather loud growl of annoyance. "What's his problem, anyway?" she muttered, staring at Swallowfur as he slowly disappeared into the distance. "He clearly just wanted to cause problems!"

Flameheart rest his tail on her spine, perhaps as a comforting gesture. She jumped at the sudden movement, but as she looked at Flameheart, her eyes sparkling as if she suddenly forgot about her anger. "It's alright, Amberwind, some cats are just too tense with this sudden peace. He did nothing wrong."

"Y-you're right," she said quickly.

Shiningmoon heaved out a sigh. "Oh, StarClan."

Amberwind looked at her. "What?"

Dropeyes exchanged a knowing glance with Icestar, her expression trickling with amusement. *Amberwind clearly likes Flameheart*, he thought as he began to lead the patrol to their first mark. "Come on, let's get this border patrol finished quickly," he said over his shoulder.

As Icestar led the patrol, he let his paws sink heavily into the soft dirt and grass. He let his chest fill with the freshly warm and sweet air. He let his ears listen to the lively prey of the ground and trees alike, catching the song of a sparrow in the close distance. But most of all, he let himself sink into the moment and relax, all of his troubles and previous thoughts flowing out of his mind like a river.

What point was there to worry about dreams and rogue cats when he could have a good time with his Clanmates? The Clans were at a time of peace, and he should relish it before it was gone.

* * *

A vole dangled from Icestar's mouth as he made his return. He

slipped through the camp entrance with Amberwind at his heels, immediately noticing that all patrols were back in camp. Excitement buzzed around camp, the liveliness pleasing Icestar. It's so good to see MoonClan thrive! The hunting patrols seemed to have done a good job, for the fresh-kill pile was filled to the brim with just enough food for everyone. Icestar observed the clearing as Crowflight, Amberwind, Shiningmoon and Flameheart dispersed into the crowd.

Skypelt was in the medicine den with Squirreltail, Goldsun and Thrushclaw. Even Sweetheart, who was working on some of her herbs, seemed to have joined in their conversation. Sharpfang was by the far end of camp, watching the prisoner rogue intensely as if he was up to something. Nightrose, Fireshade, Shadowheart and Rainwhisker were all sharing a rabbit with Thrushclaw, while Volefur, Dawnheart, Redsky and Petalwing stood by the leader's den as they spoke. The only apprentice, Bloodpaw, was cleaning out the nursery bedding at the instruction of perhaps Sharpfang, while Sagepelt and Swiftbreeze sunbathed along with Swiftbreeze's young son, Smokekit. Berrykit and Shadekit tackled each other nearby.

Icestar found his mate and kits by the apprentice den. Silverleaf was in a hunter's crouch as she spoke to Ravenkit and Dewkit, and the two nodded eagerly as they tried to copy her. *They're at the age to learn now, huh?* he thought. He decided to meet with them, but first there was something he had to do.

He made his way down the clearing, stopping by his deputy, and dropped the vole on the ground by his paws. The rogue stared at it hungrily.

"How are things, going, Sharpfang?" Icestar asked, taking a swift glance at their prisoner. Though it has been days, the rogue's yellow-pelt-turned-brown was as matted as ever, his fur tangled and knotted in places that would take perhaps a whole cycle to clean out. Despite Bloodpaw, Amberwind and Blacksun regularly providing water for the rogue, his stomach looked deprived of food from the lack of it for days, and Icestar couldn't help but feel a bit bad.

"They're getting better," admitted Sharpfang. "But this mangy flea-

pelt insists on keeping everything to himself. He told me that the place he came from is where the sun sets, and that his leader sent him out here. That's as far as I know."

"At least your name," Icestar said, turning back to the rogue. "Tell it to us."

The rogue spat. "Not over my dead body."

"Which will be soon, unless you drop your pride and realize that keeping silent will kill you," Icestar growled, placing a paw on his vole. "I'll make sure you get a daily piece of prey over the next few days if you at least tell us your name."

The rogue hesitated. Icestar could practically hear his stomach growl from starvation. *Hunger is the only way to make a cat talk*, he remembered Sharpfang say. Perhaps it was finally starting to work.

"No," the rogue firmly stated. "I shall not tell you my name." And with that, he laid on the ground heavily, and let low growl emitted from his throat.

Sharpfang gave a curt nod. "I'll take it from here, Icestar."

Icestar took a deep breath, recalling the brief conversation he had with Flameheart this morning. *I have the troubling suspicion that these rogues are out to kill me*, Icestar had told him, before Crowflight's sudden interruption. As he stared at MoonClan's prisoner, Icestar wondered if his intentions were to kill the cat who destroyed, just as Jinx had said. But why had Jinx been so open about it and this rogue so quiet?

Icestar tucked his troubling thoughts to the back of his mind, reminding himself that he was not supposed to dwell on such thoughts with times as peaceful as this. With a silent reassurance to himself, he picked up his vole and made his way to Silverleaf and the kits, knowing that Sharpfang would be fine handling the rogue on his own.

As he approached, Ravenkit leaped onto Dewkit, yowling, "You're mine, evil rogue!"

Dewkit gasped. "No, get off!" He fell onto his back on a swift motion, his paws pinned over his head by his sister. With her mouth, she nipped at his face and he hissed, kicking her in return. Ravenkit squealed with delight and let go of his forepaws, batting her white paws on his head as he tried to kick her weight off of him. Silverleaf watched the two, her back to Icestar, her tail flicking with amusement.

"Ow, ow, ow!" Dewkit suddenly yowled. "Ravenkit, you're hurting my scratch!"

"No, you're just being a big scaredy-mouse!" she taunted playfully.

Silverleaf put a paw in between the two, gently pushing Ravenkit off her brother. "Now, now, Ravenkit, don't get too excited. Remember that the two of you still have scratches from that little incident that needs healing."

"Mine don't bother me anymore, Silverleaf," Ravenkit insisted. "Dewkit just can't handle pain like I can."

"Can too! I had it worse than you!" he snapped, turning around to expose the scratch on his side. "If you could have felt the pain—" he stopped speaking as his eyes traveled behind Silverleaf. Finally, he noticed his father. "Icestar's back!" mewed the kit with excitement, quickly forgetting his scratch. He ran up to Icestar along with Ravenkit as Silverleaf spun around, purring.

"Icestar, how was patrol?" she asked, touching her nose to his.

He put down his vole. "It was great. We ran into CloudClan, and Grassheart said that they were doing well."

"Did you fight them?" asked Ravenkit eagerly. "You're the best fighter in all of the Clans!"

Icestar swiped his daughter's ear. "You know I'm not," he said humorously, "And of course we didn't. The Clans are on good terms, especially MoonClan with CloudClan. We should cherish our alliance for as long as it will be. Hardships come at our peaceful times like cats hunting prey."

"What does *that* mean?" she asked, tilting her head.

He gave her a gentle lick over her ear. "You don't have to worry about it now, but perhaps you'll know when you're a warrior."

"Hopefully not," Silverleaf added with a sigh. Ravenkit slumped back, clearly in thought.

Dewkit prodded Icestar's foreleg. "Is that a vole you caught, Icestar?" he asked, looking at it hungrily.

He nodded and pushed the vole toward his son. "Yes, you can have it if you'd like. Why don't you take it over by Sagepelt and eat it there with Ravenkit?"

Ravenkit hared forward and grabbed the prey, calling over her shoulder, "Come on, Dewkit! You're too slow!"

Dewkit glanced up at Icestar, clearly frustrated, and pelted after his littermate. Icestar watched the two with amusement, knowing that there had been no greater trouble-makers than them. Though they often angered their parents and Clanmates by getting into things that they shouldn't, his love for them never faltered.

"Isn't there something you have to do?" asked Silverleaf with a tilt of her head.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She motioned toward the medicine den with her paw. "Sweetheart returned from the Night Flower. Looked like she was in deep thought ever since. StarClan must have . . . spoken to her." She looked back to her mate, eyes hopeful. Of course she knew about all of Icestar's ordeals—she was the one cat he confided most in, other than Flameheart or Sharpfang.

Icestar had given the medicine cat's half-moon meeting seldom thought, however. He had been too enveloped in his own conflicting thoughts to even remember to ask Sweetheart about it. "Do you think I should bother her?" he murmured, watching her run her paws down Skypelt's broken back paw.

"It seemed important," she replied. "If I were leader, I would."

"But she hasn't come to talk to me. Perhaps she doesn't want to tell me about her dream."

"Stop being so hesitant," she scolded. "I'll go with you if you like. I know you don't want to get involved with trouble anymore, but it's better to be aware of things than in the dark." With that, she stood up and began to make her way over to the medicine den. Icestar reluctantly followed, his eyes downcast to his paws.

As they approached the medicine den, Thrushclaw gave a raspy purr. "Look who's back, Goldsun!" exclaimed the elder, gently prodding her side. "Shouldn't you let him know?"

Silverleaf jumped. "Oh, Icestar, I forgot to tell you!"

Squirreltail purred as Goldsun stood up. Icestar reached by his mate's side. "What is it that you need to tell me?" he asked.

"Goldsun's expecting my kits," Squirreltail purred, giving her an affectionate lick behind her ear. "Isn't it great?"

"It's wonderful!" Silverleaf said, to which she added, "I can't believe you're going to be a father at last, Squirreltail."

Icestar let a deep purr escape his throat. "Congratulations!"

Sweetheart emerged from the medicine den, her pelt messy from a day's worth without grooming. Icestar stared at the beautiful medicine cat with astonishment. For her to look so unkept must mean that she was troubled. *Something must have happened during the half-moon*.

Sweetheart looked in between all the cats, and spoke up. "That's great news, Goldsun. But I believe Icestar is here to speak with me. We'd like a bit of privacy, if you will."

Goldsun gave a respectful nod. "We'll talk later," she told Silverleaf, before she and her group padded off to meet with Redsky, Dawnheart and Petalwing.

"What . . . what has happened, Sweetheart?" murmured Icestar, fearful of what she had to say. "Has StarClan visited you?"

"They have indeed," she replied, leading Icestar and Silverleaf to an isolated part of camp. "I was in the territories, and there was this storm unlike anything I've ever seen. Trees were falling, the ground was breaking apart, and there was a great flood where we are standing at this moment."

Silverleaf shivered, pressing closer to Icestar. "A vision of the future?" she whispered.

"I—I don't know. StarClan is mysterious," she whispered, shaking her head slowly. "And Vinetail visited me, too. He was grim, Icestar, and it wasn't right. He told me a new prophecy."

"*Prophecy*?" the fur along Icestar's spine bristled as he remembered the dream he had of Shard. *Things are not over.*

"*The ancient secrets of the forest will sway of a new path for three cats alone,*" she murmured, her voice laced with anger and frustration. "Something is happening, and the three mentioned are going to change the destiny of the Clans. I know of nothing more." And with that, she swirled around and padded back to the medicine den, clearly deep in thought.

Icestar stared after her with horror. *She doesn't know what it means!* he thought. *That vision . . . that prophecy. The Clans are in a mysterious new danger!*

# Chapter Ten

The moonlight washed over Icestar's dark fur as he lead his Clan through StreamClan territory. The gathering place was close and his heart beat wildly as his mind thought up the things to say. Silverleaf had given him encouraging words before his departure, but even her smooth way of speech couldn't keep his mind from whirling.

Sharpfang nudged Icestar's shoulder. "The Clan will be fine," he said, as if sensing all of Icestar's worries. "Redsky and Petalwing are strong and sharp—they won't let that rogue out of their sight." Before he left, Sharpfang had assigned the two she-cat warriors to watch their prisoner.

"It's not the rogue that I am worried about," muttered Icestar. "I know everyone we left in camp will be fine. It's the gathering I'm worried about."

His paws treaded over the cool soft grass, the muscles in his shoulders tense. He'd walked this path for many moons, and yet it felt different for the first time. The gentle newleaf wind that breezed through his whiskers had an eerie taste, and his fur could not help but prickle. Sweetheart's words . . . the changing forest . . . the new attacks, too. It was causing a change.

The deputy looked over his shoulder to make sure that the group was following closely. "Well, if the speaking is what's making you nervous, stop being such a scaredy-mouse. You've done it plenty of times."

"What's more is, your attitude scares me," Icestar said, at an attempt to create humor.

Sharpfang's ears pricked. "What?"

"You're usually so mean and ill-tempered. You haven't been the grouchy old Sharpfang I used to know these past two moons," he

meowed.

Sharpfang rolled his eyes. "You expect me to snap at everyone after a battle? It took a lot of willpower to hold my tongue but if you want I can start here—"

He stopped speaking, and for a moment Icestar wondered why. He opened his mouth to talk, when suddenly, the ground beneath his paws trembled lightly. He stopped in his tracks. Shiningmoon, who was treading closely behind, bumped into his rump, while Volefur and Blacksun peered up.

Sharpfang must have felt the tremor too. "Icestar," his murmur was fast and alarmed. "You don't think another tree will fall?"

He shook his head. "No. It's the forest . . . can't you feel it?"

Though the trees did croak, the ground underpaw felt unsteady. A few paces ahead was a shallow scoop into the ground, covered by bramble thickets and a narrow gaping hole downward. A few more paces, and Icestar would have fallen. He took a step back, his breath caught in his throat, and he let out a cough. It smelled terrible!

*So StreamClan is affected too*, he thought.

"What is this stench?" Amberwind growled, crouching by her former mentor's side.

Sharpfang inhaled, but it was followed by a short sneeze. "Twoleg stench!" He looked down at the hole. "Icestar, I can't help but recall being down there once when Sparrowheart was still deputy."

Amberwind's ears drew back and her nose scrunched up in disgust. "Yuck!"

"I know," he responded. Then, he turned back to his patrol, consisting of a little over a dozen Clanmates. "We're going to have to go around! I want no cat going *near* that hole, or any for that matter! Stay as far away from them as possible, and be weary of the trees!"

A few cats murmured with curiosity, but most were with worry.

*There's nothing I can say to them now,* he thought. *I will discuss it tonight at the gathering.* As Icestar began to lead around it, Sharpfang held his neck high. "Squirreltail?"

"Right here," the gray tom meowed, poking through the crowd.

"Take the rear end, and keep a close eye out so that no cat falls." The deputy's words were low. Icestar stopped listening and looked ahead, weary of finding another gaping hole. They were already so close to the gathering place, and he didn't expect the dangers to be this far-reached!

The rest of the walk was safe. No trees had fallen, the ground hadn't crumpled, and they didn't find any more entrances to the underground system. The stench also wore off as they traveled, until they finally reached the all-too familiar gathering place. He was thankful that he returned here for yet another moon safely. By the look of it, the three other Clans were already waiting as Icestar's cats dispersed through the clearing.

As Icestar leaped upon the rock with the other leaders, Swiftstar was the first to dip his head. "It is good you have made it safely," the CloudClan leader said.

"You too, Swiftstar," replied Icestar. Then, he looked at the other two leaders. "We can start as soon as you'd like."

Stonestar dipped her head. She turned around and padded to the front of the rock, holding her neck high as she scanned the clearing of cats. "Now that all four Clans have come together peacefully, let the full-moon gathering begin!" she called out, her voice loud and clear. "MarshClan shall begin, if there are no objections."

Icestar and Swiftstar dipped their heads with approval, and so she began speaking. "Our Clan is doing well with the change of weather. StarClan has blessed our marshes with an abundant amount of prey, and *four* new apprentices. Swamppaw, Lizardpaw, Logpaw, and Hazelpaw have all reached the age of six moons and had their official ceremonies last quarter-moon!"

The Clans began to cheer out the names of the four apprentices, and Icestar scanned the group, wondering if he'd spot them. He didn't know what they looked like, but instantly knew it was them when he saw four young cats by a few MarshClan warriors, sticking their heads up proudly. Icestar felt slightly envious that MarshClan had so many apprentices to train, while all MoonClan had was Bloodpaw at the moment, but soon he knew they'd have Berrykit and Shadekit too. *And my own kits in a few moons*, he thought with a purr.

"That will be all for us," Stonestar said, taking a few steps back, sitting right beside Swiftstar. Her gray-striped tail rest neatly on her paws.

The leaders waited for a moment, allowing any other cat to go up next. Lakestar took the invitation, and padded to the base of the rock, overlooking the Clans coolly. "My Clan is doing just as well. Though we have no new warriors nor apprentices, we do have a strong system of cats, as well as fish in the lakes. StreamClan is surviving with the help of StarClan." For a moment, he stopped with a long pause, as if he was in consideration for a moment. "And recently . . . we lost our dear apprentice, Foxpaw, to an accident. She lost her life to Twoleg monsters." A gasp went around the clearing, and Icestar's own fur bristled. Then, Lakestar continued, his voice deep and low. "I warn every cat to stay away from Twolegs. They give no consideration to lives but their own. That will be all," he finally said, breaking his own silence. He turned around and padded back to his spot, tail lashing.

*I didn't think that the Twolegs were so bad that they had the capability of claiming a cat's life!* Icestar thought as he listened to the murmurs traveling through the crowd.

One MarshClan cat said, "We've been hearing a lot of Twolegs cutting down the trees lately."

"It is true," Rabbitleg of CloudClan replied.

"DarkClan territory has been crawling with Twolegs," whispered Stonetooth. "It's unfortunate for the Clans since that is center territory. I wonder what is going to happen . . ."

Icestar gulped. *That is exactly what I will talk about.*

"I will go next," Swiftstar said, taking his place in front of all the warriors. All cats silenced and looked up to him. "CloudClan thrives as well. We have recently named a new apprentice, Mallowpaw." He paused and took a deep breath, allowing the Clans to chant her name. When he yowling died off, he continued. "But there is an issue I believe we are all avoiding, with the exception of Icestar who has yet to speak." He looked around. "The Twolegs are threatening the lives of all the Clans! It is evident by StreamClan's unfortunate loss . . . and evident by their evil work in the forests."

Icestar closed his eyes, relieved. *I wasn't the only one who noticed these issues.*

"I would like to speak on the matter," he piped up as he stood.

Swiftstar dipped his head. "Alright. That concludes CloudClan's report."

Icestar took the cue and thought for a few heartbeats, the gathering enveloping in quietness. Finally, he found his words. "As for MoonClan, we have recently named Amberwind and Blacksun our two newest warriors," he meowed. "And Goldsun has moved into the nursery. We are doing well internally." The Clans chanted for the two new warriors, but it was a bit weary. Every cat wanted to hear what Icestar had to say about the recent problems. "Now I wanted to address the issue with the Twolegs. Many moons ago, a MoonClan patrol discovered this underground system of Twolegs. Right under the forest, we saw their monsters breaking through the roots of the trees and rocks . . . But never have we thought that it would start ruining the territories, *or* take away lives," he added, giving a sympathetic glance to Lakestar. "However, DarkClan territory is unstable, and I advise all the Clans to stay away from it."

Unsure murmurs rippled through the crowd.

Ferretheart, StreamClan's deputy, let out a loud growl. "There is truth to what you hold that DarkClan is unstable, Icestar, but telling us to keep away from it? That only makes us believe you want it all to yourself!" His white fur was bristled. "We all know how much

territory DarkClan had. How much prey that could mean!"

"Icestar's intentions are good!" Amberwind yowled, making her way to the front of the MoonClan crowd. "You can't accuse him like that!"

Icestar stared down at her worriedly. "Amberwind, don't."

"No, she's right!" exclaimed a StreamClan cat, raising his muzzle up. He was a light gray cat, but perhaps in the sun he'd look more tan than gray. "Even StreamClan is being affected by the Twolegs. We *all* are!"

"Troutfire, be quiet!" snapped Lakestar.

Troutfire ducked his head down, but he still seemed to stick true to what he said, even though some of his Clanmates were giving him disapproving glares. In just an instant, however, talking erupted throughout he crowd, as rumors and whispers spread about. Icestar stared at the clearing, unable to figure out what to do.

The group of cats parted around Swallowfur, the rude CloudClan warrior that MoonClan's patrol had met half a moon ago, as he made his way to the center of the crowd. Like before, he was with Smallfeather. "Icestar does not respect his own boundaries. How could you not see his selfish intentions?" he called out, giving the group of cats a long stare. "We can't trust MoonClan!"

"Take that back!" Amberwind snarled, leaping to his face at an instant. Flameheart was immediately in between them before anything could happen.

Much to Icestar's relief, Sharpfang stood up from the base of the leader's rock, raising his voice loud. "Everyone, it's *Icestar's* turn! No such disrespect is allowed toward a Clan leader, especially at a *gathering*!" Instantly, the talking silenced, and so did a few arguments that were going through the Clan. Swallowfur and Smallfeather glowered as they stalked to the back of the clearing, and Amberwind's nose flared while Flameheart murmured something in her ear. Icestar looked up to the moon, wondering if StarClan would disapprove of such a small dispute. The night sky

was cloudless, however, and the big moon full and bright.

Icestar dipped his head to his deputy as a way of saying thanks, before continuing. "Yes, this is very controversial!" he said. "That is blatantly obvious. And I have no right to tell the other Clan leaders how to lead. But I advise you, for the wellbeing of all the Clans!" He paused, looking around. Ferretheart's head was ducked in anger as Troutfire glared him down. Amberwind took a quick glance back at the CloudClan cat, Swallowfur, as if shooting back a threat. For a moment, Icestar considered his next words. He finally spoke once more. "Skypelt has been hurt because of the falling trees. I wish that upon *no* cat."

"Is that all, Icestar?" Lakestar asked, his voice low.

Icestar turned his gaze to the StreamClan leader. "Unfortunately, it is not. I also have some troubling news."

"Go on," Stonestar encouraged, her voice urgent. "If the trees are not the only issue, we should all know about it!"

Icestar turned back down to the Clans. "There has been rogues in our territories!" he called out. "Though we have only encountered two, there have been rumored to be many more in a forest to the direction where the sun sets. But . . . but they're setting out in our territory for reasons unknown." He had considered mentioning what their goal was, but Icestar did not want to think about it. Every time he did, he remembered Shard, he remembered his dreams, and he remembered Sweetheart's mysterious new prophecy. He decided to only conclude to this much information.

There had been a long silence before Icestar finally gave out his last words. "These rogues have not harmed us yet. Though one had been hostile, they don't seem to be too keen on advancing on us when they know they're not at an advantage. So I warn every cat to stay in groups, and stay safe from all threats. Whether it'd be Twolegs, falling trees, or rogues . . ."

* * *

The camp was unsettled the next morning. Sharpfang was already

up and about setting up patrols, but Icestar decided not to join any. He sat on the top of his den, staring at the dawn sun rising in the sky. The light warmed his fur and lighted his camp, bringing a new day. He closed his eyes and breathed in the chilly morning air.

In the distance, Icestar could hear the birds in the trees already beginning their songs. Beyond the camp walls, bugs and prey alike began to leave their burrows for food. Patrols got ready too, preparing to leave for hunting and border-marking, like any other day despite the ominous feeling of uncertainty making its way around.

"Icestar!" Sharpfang called by the base of the leader's rock. Icestar's eyes opened and he looked down to the dark gray tom. "Are you sure you don't want to join a patrol?" Sharpfang looked over his shoulder to his border patrol. Sagepelt, who had recently rejoined the warriors den, was waiting for him, along with Rainwhisker. Berrykit and Shadekit did not need to sleep with their mother anymore, for their apprentice she was drawing nearer by the day.

Icestar brought himself to nod. "Yes, there's something else I have to do."

"Okay," he responded. He turned around, but hesitated for a moment. "I'll ask you about it when we return," Sharpfang said, before finally padding away. He met with his group, exchanging quick words with them before slipping out of the camp entrance. The patrol followed as soon as he was on the other side of the camp.

Icestar sat and thought for a moment, before finally leaping off the leader's rock. Flameheart was grooming himself in front of the warrior's den, smoothing down his orange fur after a long night of sleep. His ear twitched as he heard Icestar's approaching paw-steps, and he looked up. His green eyes met Icestar's amber ones.

"Good morning," he said in his usual polite tone.

"Morning," Icestar mumbled, and looked around quickly. He looked back to the warrior. "You know, I've been thinking about something." Flameheart stopped licking his paw, and lifted his head.

"That rogue . . . he told Sharpfang yesterday some useful information. And I thought there was something we could do today."

"Go on," Flameheart said.

"I want to scout a bit beyond Clanless territory," he said, "toward the direction where the sun sets. We might find something there."

"What do you think we'd find? A group of rogues just outside of MoonClan?" questioned Flameheart.

Icestar shrugged. "Maybe."

"I hope you're not doing this out of a whim, Icestar. I'll follow you anyhow," he murmured under his breath. He turned around and looked over his shoulder. Amberwind was leading a hunting patrol by CloudClan borders and was just about to leave. His eyes followed her as she left the camp. "Who knows if Clanless territory is dangerous?" His voice was light.

Icestar gave his friend a comforting lick over the ear. "It's not dangerous, as far as I've seen. If you're afraid of venturing out, I don't have to take you. You are one of the cats I trust the most, is all. If we find anything that could help us then we'd be closer into finding out where that rogue comes from."

Flameheart paused for a long moment. His eyes shone dimly. "I'll go with you on one condition, Icestar."

"What?" the leader asked.

"We go at night," Flameheart said, turning his gaze up.

* * *

Icestar had told Sharpfang about his plan that evening. The deputy, although a bit skeptical and nervous, seemed to agree on it quickly, and Icestar left him in charge of the camp as he and Flameheart slipped out of the camp entrance that night. The cats who were awake would simply think they were going on a hunt during moonhigh, but everyone asleep would never know about their

departure.

*We should be back by morning, anyhow*, thought Icestar as he walked through MoonClan territory. Before the sun had set, he memorized its direction just in case, realizing that he was walking slightly toward StreamClan territory and Twoleg territory.

On rare occasions had Icestar come across Twolegs, kittypets and their monsters. No thunderpaths roared through Clan territory as they had all mostly been isolated this whole time. No kittypet ever dared venture beyond Sweetheart's herb patch by the border, either. However, with the Twolegs cutting down their trees more and more, and the rogues entering Clan territory like never before, Icestar knew that he would have to leave his Clan, be it for just a night, to discover something new that could help his mystery.

Flameheart trotted by Icestar's side as they made their way to where the line of trees ended. They came across Sweetheart's herb patch, making sure not to tread over her new plants, and stopped right at the line of their territory. The distant sound of barking dogs and wailing monsters were just ahead.

Flameheart shuttered beside Icestar. "We won't have to go through the Twoleg place, will we?" he murmured, eyes worried.

"No," Icestar murmured back, "but we'll have to tread near it."

His companion gave a tiny nod, and the two of them crossed over to the uninhabited Clanless territory. The terrain was completely flat, dotted with short tree trunks and occasional shrubbery here and there, as if the Twolegs had cleared the forest from this area long ago. The grass short and smelled unusually fresh, so they had to walk along their only protection of the stubs and small bushes. Icestar had visited the open CloudClan territory before, and it was unlike the Clanless territory of unknown dangers and strange terrain. He had never felt so exposed in his life.

His paws pressed into the hard, stubby grass, uncomfortable from its unusual spiky feeling. He had never felt grass so short, itchy and uncomfortable against his paw pads. Only a few fox-lengths away from his territory and he was already uncomfortable to the feeling.

It was too new, too unnatural.

As the two walked in silence, MoonClan's oak trees were the mere size of a small owl in the distance. The Twoleg town was closer than ever, and Icestar swore that he had never ventured so far from his Clan before. *And I hope I never have to again*, he thought, glancing at Flameheart.

After moments more of walking, Flameheart stopped in his tracks, and lifted his nose up to the sky. Icestar turned around and watched, knowing that he picked up a scent.

"What is it?" Icestar asked, unable to catch anything at all.

Flameheart's mouth parted slightly and he continued smelling around. Then, he turned and looked at his leader. "You're right, Icestar," said the tom. "I smell cats. And it's fresh."

"Do you think it could be the cat from Amberwind's warrior assessment?" Icestar wondered, his voice low.

"Perhaps. But there is more than just one cat." He began to walk forward. "This way."

Icestar gave a tiny nod, half hoping that he would find the rogues sleeping. The other part of him hoped that the rogues returned wherever they came from, finding nothing that they needed. He followed Flameheart on the open land, disappearing through in dark night unnoticed.

**A/N sorry if this chapter was a little tedious. As you may notice, I'm pushing myself hard to get through the rising actions. I already know what's going to happen after all of this, of course, since I'm the author. But to get to the plot, I have to build up to that, and man that is difficult. But I shall live through it! Let me know of my mistakes please! :)**

# Chapter Eleven

[image]

**I'M. ACTUALLY. DOING IT. (look at the picture above). It won't be out anytime soon because I just started this book after all, but I'M 75% SURE I AM WRITING *Dewstar's Darkness* !**

Dewkit's flank heaved as he settled down into his nest, his belly full from prey he had just eaten. It was dark, almost time to sleep, and Silverleaf had just told the kits to settle down with her in the nursery. Ravenkit tried to insist that she was energetic and didn't want to go to the nest already, but after Icestar reminded her that she was on the verge of having her future apprentice ceremony revoked from all the troublemaking she'd caused, she had instantly sprung along with Silverleaf.

Silverleaf pulled Dewkit in close as the two settled in. He hated to admit it, but nothing felt better than the comfort of his mother's warm fur. *Ravenkit would tease me if she ever found out*! he thought, burying his nose into her silver pelt, already embarrassed by just the thought. Ravenkit slumped down on his tail, clearly not ready to sleep yet.

"Have you got any stories?" muttered Ravenkit. "I'm not sleepy yet."

"I'd tell you one, but Shadekit hates being disturbed from his sleep," whispered Silverleaf with a humorous purr.

Ravenkit puffed. "Oh, he's just sleeping! Come on, tell us!"

"Would you like to hear one, Dewkit?" Silverleaf asked.

He thought for a moment. "I guess so."

"Then, this is a story about Icestar and Dewstar," she told them, her voice barely above a whisper. "It's no elder's tail, you see. It's a true story."

"You mean Icestar's brother?" Dewkit murmured, knowing that Dewstar is where he got his name from. *I've never heard too much about him*, thought the kit, *But I've been told that I looked like him once before*. He gulped. *And that he was evil.*

Silverleaf gave a small nod. "Yes, Dewstar is your kin. He died the day you were born, too, during the Dark War." Her voice got lower as she spoke. "This is a story that's important to remember, despite the bloodshed, despite the wars . . ."

"*Wars*?" whispered Ravenkit, eyes sparkling.

Their mother shook her head. "War is no exciting event. It is brutal. Many lives were lost among the Clans from the wars, and it is something we all want to never face again." She looked down to the two of them. "That is why I think it's important to tell you, so that every future warrior will know the importance of avoiding it. After all, no cat is born with a bad heart."

"But Dewstar was," murmured Dewkit, remembering once the taunts he received from Bloodpaw and Shadekit.

*I'm not only kin to a murderer, but I share his name!*

"Dewstar was a good cat," Silverleaf said. "But he let himself be misled."

"So what is this story?" Ravenkit asked, turning onto her back so that her belly faced the den's ceiling. "A story about good and bad, Icestar and Dewstar! I can't wait to hear it." Her black kit-fur was not as neatly groomed as Dewkit's. After all, she could never hold still when it was her turn to be groomed, and so she always managed to escape Silverleaf's nightly grooming.

She tucked both kits closer to her belly and Dewkit accepted the warmth of his mother and sister. "When Dewstar was young he was just like Icestar. But soon, both of them came across a situation where he had to make the decision of being good or bad."

"Obviously Dewstar chose to be bad," snorted Ravenkit.

"Oh, he did, but he was left with not much of a choice," Silverleaf

said firmly. "And Icestar was at a loss himself. They let themselves be led by their dreams and eventually started to be driven by fate. It's something no cat has to do—we all should choose for ourselves of how our lives will be on our own accord."

"But why? If StarClan tells us to do something, shouldn't we do it?" Ravenkit asked.

"Yes, but . . . it's also a choice we make for ourselves," she tried to advise. "We don't listen to StarClan on a natural instinct. We do it because we want to."

Dewkit stared at the twinkling night sky from his nest, eyes getting droopy. His father and his Clan had suffered so much before he was born. He had only seen a glimpse of the hard life when there was still snow, but he was very little then and had little to no memories of it all. His earliest memory by sight is of Icestar standing over him, bloodied and scratched from battle. It was a hazy image, unlike the flashbacks of the Clan running low on food and herbs. But now, since the warm weather was changing conditions rapidly, Dewkit wanted to forget such suffering.

Silverleaf continued telling Dewkit and Ravenkit her tale of Icestar's battle with Dewstar, and eventually, Dewkit fell asleep.

When he woke again, he was surprised to find that he wasn't in the nursery, cuddling by his mother's warm fur. In fact, he want in MoonClan at all! Alarmed, he looked around quickly, his surroundings unrecognizable.

All around him stood tall oak trees, some unnaturally tall. They formed a canopy of leaves on long branches, dappling the sunlight on the ground. His surroundings were blanketed in coats of white, and nearby a small stream ran, noticeable by the loud water.

Are the white coats over the forest ground snow? *I thought snow was supposed to be cold.* His paws tread over the slushing white.

"Where am I?" he murmured out loud to himself.

Of course, there was no response. He was hoping for one, however.

With no clue on what to do, he proceeded forward, wondering how he got here. The last thing he remembered was listening to Silverleaf's story as slowly drifted off . . . Could he possibly be sleeping?

The air tasted unusually good, making him feel as if he could run countless laps around MoonClan's camp. He felt as if he could beat Ravenkit in a fight, or even fly up in the trees like a bird. Dewkit kicked off the ground and ran through the snow, his heart beating. What a lovely dream! He raced along the forest, elated to be someplace where he was the strongest cat in the Clans, instead of the weakest.

He felt as strong as Icestar had been, in the Battle of Darkness.

As he dashed through the forest, he stopped short when he spotted a piece of prey up in the trees. What was it, a vole? As he got closer, he could distinctly se its bushy and long tail merging colors with the gray-and-brown tree. *Perhaps it's a squirrel. They have tails like this, right*?

He wriggled his haunches, and leaped at it, opening his paws completely as if he'd catch it like that. But before he even had the chance to land on it, the squirrel dashed up the tree and disappeared into the thick bundle of leaves.

Well, maybe he *wasn't* as strong as Icestar or his sister.

"What are you doing, kit?" said a voice so suddenly that Dewkit leaped with surprise. He thought he'd been alone in his dream world! Whirling around, he saw a cat he'd never seen before standing over him, with cool dark blue eyes and short white fur, matching the snow around them.

"I was hunting," Dewkit said, tilting his head. "And who are *you*?"

"Just a loner," he responded, flicking his tail. "You don't think you're going to ever catch prey like *that*, do you?"

Dewkit shrugged his shoulders, feeling hot with embarrassment. So this stranger had seen him after all. "I dunno," he mumbled, hoping

he wouldn't be made fun of. At least it wasn't the other kits who'd seen him—they wouldn't miss a heartbeat to tease his poor skills in hunting, excluding Shadekit, who hardly cared about what he did.

"You're Icestar's son, right?" the stranger asked, keeping his unfaltering blue eyes on him.

With a jump, Dewkit nodded. "How'd you know?"

"Because you remind me of him," the stranger responded. He padded closer, and Dewkit didn't bother moving, his eyes round with curiosity to this loner who'd wandered into his dream. "Want me to teach you a real hunter's crouch?"

Dewkit thought about it, imagining showing it off to his sister, but ended up shaking his head. "No, I'm more curious to how you know Icestar."

The stranger's ears slightly pushed back, his gaze clearly solemn. "I see."

*He's weird!* Dewkit thought, tilting his head again. Not only was this stranger mysterious, but he said things that Dewkit hardly understood!

"See what? I asked a question, but that's barely a response at all!" the kit said, taking a step closer as his mind wondered.

The white cat looked slightly amused. "It's alright, I'll answer any question you have some other time, Dewkit."

The kit jumped with surprise. "How do you know my—"

"All in due time," the stranger said, padding past him this time, taking long and graceful strides. "This won't be the last you'll see of me. But be conscience that I only show up during the darkness."

And with that, the stranger faded into the trees.

Dewkit stared at him as he disappeared, completely shocked and confused at his random dream encounter. He looked up to the sky and squinted his eyes against the bright light. *But it's not dark at all!*

*What in StarClan's name did he mean? And how did he know me and Icestar?*

He shook his head.

"It was nothing," he mumbled. "Just a cat in a dream, that's all. He wasn't real."

*I'm just being silly!* Dewkit thought, continuing along in his dream.

* * *

When Dewkit woke up again, he wasn't surprised to find out that the sun had already risen above the trees. With a warm pelt and a growling belly, he stretched as he left the nursery. The only cats that were in there were Swiftbreeze and Smokekit, who were still sleeping. Silverleaf and Ravenkit were gone, their spots cold as if they'd been awake since dawn, and so were the other kits. He wondered what they were up to.

As he padded out into camp, Dewkit saw Sharpfang padding around the warriors den like he usually does on mornings. However, something felt different today. Cats were hastily walking to and fro the camp as if in a rush. Dewkit watched as Rainwhisker and Fireshade had their ears alert, as if listening to the forest for quiet sounds. Nightrose, Shadowheart and Petalwing were watching the rogue closely, their pelts bristled with obvious discomfort.

A few moments later, Volefur and Dawnstripe burst into the camp. "We can't find them!" exclaimed the light orange she-cat, her eyes wide. "We searched everywhere!"

"Find who?" Dewkit wondered out loud, looking around. Nobody seemed to be missing . . . right? He tried to stop Squirreltail to ask him what was going on, but the young warrior shooed the kit off his paws and padded quickly to Sharpfang as if he had important business.

A bit frustrated, all the more curious, Dewkit turned his head, wondering who was able to talk to him.

Bloodpaw was bringing Skypelt wet moss while Shadekit and

Berrykit lingered around the medicine den, listening to Sweetheart speak. Dewkit decided to listen in, and slowly trailed behind the apprentice, straining his ears to listen to the conversation.

"—you don't think they just went off for a late night hunt, do you?" Berrykit was saying as the medicine cat worked her paws over Skypelt's broken leg.

"No, mousebrain, they got kidnapped!" spat Shadekit.

Annoyed, Sweetheart drew her ears back. "That's very unlikely, Shadekit. The camp is set up the way it is to prevent outsiders from coming in—and even in some cat happened to wander in and take Icestar and Flameheart, they would have alerted the Clan or fought back!"

Dewkit stopped dead in his tracks. *Flameheart and my father are missing?* With stiff legs, he leaned in closer.

"I told you so, they're just out hunting!" Berrykit went on.

"That's unlikely too," Sweetheart said, making room for Bloodpaw. The apprentice entered the den and set his piece of wet moss beside his former mentor. Skypelt, whose expression was contorted in pain, leaned up and put his mouth onto the moss, sucking out its water. "That's it, Skypelt, drink slowly," she said soothingly, before returning her gaze to the kits. "Whenever Icestar went out for his midnight hunts back in his warrior days—and trust me when I say he did a *lot*—he usually let someone know, and would return long before dawn. Knowing him, he's gone out to do something dangerous."

"And why would he do that?" questioned Shadekit, throwing an accusing glare at Sweetheart. "What leader abandons his Clanmates to do something dangerous?"

By this point, Dewkit could hold his position no longer. With his heart pounding nervously, he stormed up to the bigger and older kits. "My father would never abandon his Clanmates!"

Surprised, Sweetheart gave him an acknowledging look. "Oh, you're

up."

"Yes," Dewkit said with a nod. "How long have they been missing?"

"No one knows, because they didn't tell anyone where they were going," snarled Shadekit with annoyance. "And who are you to talk to be like that? Do you think that just because you're the leader's kit that makes you special?"

Dewkit's eyes widened. He didn't expect an angry response from his denmate. "I wasn't—"

"You should respect me," Shadekit went on, narrowing his eyes. "I'm older *and* stronger than you."

Bloodpaw was watching the two, interest sparking in his eyes. Conflict had always interested the apprentice, especially when it involved Dewkit. For some reason, the two of them never liked him.

Dewkit threw the medicine cat a nervous glance, but she wasn't paying attention by this point. Her attention had returned back to Skypelt, who needed more attention for his leg.

When he returned his gaze to Shadekit, he gulped. "Being older and stronger doesn't make you any better than me," he forced himself to say. Though he was a weak kit, he didn't want his pride to be destroyed.

Shadekit stepped closer, his eyes dark and annoyed. "Why don't I show you who's the better one here?" he growled, raising his paw. Shadekit's long, sharp claws unsheathed, and Dewkit shrunk back with fear. Would his denmate really hurt him?

"You're nothing like Dewstar," Bloodpaw said after a few heartbeats of silence. "You're a weakling. And a coward."

"Am not!" Dewkit shouted back, upset. Why must they always compare him to his dead kin? It's not like he'd ever met Dewstar! And besides, just because they shared the same name, that didn't make it plausible for them to assume that Dewkit was just as evil as his uncle!

Berrykit stood up, her ears pulled back slightly. "All right, you're going too far. Let him be, Shadekit."

"And why should I?" Shadekit asked.

A bundle of black rushed past Dewkit. In an instant, his sister was in front of him, her soft kit-like fur bristled and her tail erect. "You should or else I'll make you!" Ravenkit spat.

Shadekit stared at her for a heartbeat. Then, amusement filtered into his eyes. "Is Dewkit so weak that he needs his *sister* to stand up for him?"

Bloodpaw's whiskers twitched, and Dewkit shrunk down with utter embarrassment. How could Ravenkit do this to him? He didn't ask for her help! Though he was scared stiff, he would have handled them somehow. Under his fur, Dewkit felt hot and wanted to sink to the cool, secluded underground, and stay there forever, away from these staring eyes.

Dewkit waited for Ravenkit to taunt him back, but she did something that shocked him. She swiped up her paw, and scratched Shadekit's ear, hissing with anger. In an instant, a small scratch appeared, a trickle of blood following after.

A brief moment of pain entered into Shadekit's expression, but he was quick to recover. "How dare you?" he growled, and leaped from his spot, tackling Ravenkit to the ground.

"Stop it!" Berrykit yowled.

*Oh no!* Dewkit thought, frozen in his place. *What have I done?*

"Kits, stop this instant!" Sweetheart snapped, her shadow looming over the pair of tackling kits. "Why in StarClan's name are you fighting in such a time? No, the bigger question is, why would you fight in front of the medicine cat's den? There's someone hurt here and he needs peace!"

Shadekit, who had Ravenkit pinned under his big paws, let her go reluctantly, not one trace of shame filtering into his cold eyes. Ravenkit, however, quickly recovered to her paws, bowing her head

in shame.

"I'm sorry, Sweetheart," she mumbled. "But Shadekit started it. He was making fun of—"

Sweetheart was quick to cut her off. "It doesn't matter who starts it. A good warrior never fights with his or her Clanmates, no matter what. Now you all ought to get off my tail and do something better than fighting, or I'll have both of your parents hear of it!"

Dewkit looked to his paws guiltily. Sweetheart was right. Dewstar turned on his Clanmates, and the last thing Dewkit ever wanted to do was follow in his footsteps. Next time, he would try to handle the situation better. He was determined to make his parents proud of him one day, and he especially wanted to prove to everyone that he was not in any way like Dewstar.

"Come on, Bloodpaw, Berrykit. Let's do some *apprentice* stuff," Shadekit said smugly, holding his chin up high as he whirled around and padded to the opposite direction of camp.

Ravenkit scoffed and muttered under her breath, "What's up with him today?"

"Kits," laughed Skypelt softly, his voice weak from pain in the medicine den. "I'll never forget what it's like to be one."

"Skypelt, you're awake!" Ravenkit said happily, her head snapping in his direction.

"Of course I am," he purred. His leg still looked as awkward as the day it had been crushed, but Skypelt seemed to have gotten use to the pain. His eyes shone with delight as he looked at the kits. "Now why don't you two stay with Sweetheart and I for the time being? It'll be best if you stay out of everyone's tail. And besides, I miss the youthful energy."

Happily, as if she had already forgotten about her heated anger, Ravenkit trotted inside the medicine den, sitting down a few claws away from Skypelt. She looked at Dewkit expectantly. "Are you coming or what?" she asked.

"Y-yeah," Dewkit mumbled, casting a swift glance backward to the camp. Shadekit, Berrykit and Bloodpaw were on the far side of the camp, practicing battle moves on each other. He wished he were big and strong like them, with the bravery and wits of a warrior. However, Dewkit feared he'd be like this forever: a weak and timid kit who'd always have to rely on his sister for help.

As he followed Sweetheart into the medicine den, his thoughts wandered to his dream, which he had forgotten about up until now. *This won't be the last you'll see of me*, the white loner had told him.

Even though it had only been a dream, Dewkit couldn't help but remember the cat's rippling muscles under his fur—the way he carried himself so gracefully—and even the offer he gave Dewkit: "Want me to teach you a real hunter's crouch?"

Perhaps if Dewkit were to really see this cat again . . . this would be his means of getting stronger.

# Chapter Twelve

**A little shorter than usual, but I'm happy to finally update again! If you don't remember the previous events of this book, I recommend rereading whatever is necessary. Anyway, I hope you enjoy. And please do correct any silly mistakes I make! :)**

The moon and silverpelt above were the only sources of light in the dark open Clanless territory. A strong breeze swayed the grass downward, brushing Icestar's fur in the wrong way. He stopped in his tracks, his belly pressed to the ground as he growled with frustration. Flameheart's warm pelt came beside him and pressed close, ears flattened against the wind.

"What now?" asked the warrior tom, green eyes dim and hard to make out. "Their scent washed away."

When two of them left camp, the moon was at its highest peak, and all of their Clanmates were asleep. The only cats to notice them go was Sharpfang, who knew about this mission, Redsky, who was guarding the camp entrance, and Lilyheart, who was watching the intruder. The two she-cats didn't question his departure, but nodded with silent respect as he passed by.

Now they were well past the borders where MoonClan and CloudClan met, in the direction they were hinted to go. A faint scent had been caught earlier, but it was hard to keep track of. The open land made Icestar wish he was back in camp, but he couldn't turn back for the sake of his Clanmates.

"We'll have to wait out the wind," Icestar murmured. The rogue scent was unreachable for him too. The winds had suddenly started up, interrupting their tracking, and the only thing that the two cats could smell was the stench of the nearby Twolegplace, with their disgusting monsters and mysteriously-shaped stone dens in the distance.

His eyes traveled to the outline of a few Twoleg dens, and his fur

bristled with unease. These were the creatures that were digging under their territory. And somewhere nearby were the dangerous rogues that Icestar fearfully anticipated.

For a while, the two toms stood in silence, pressing close together for warmth as the winds blew. As they waited, Icestar thought about them. They were mysterious rogues, and their goals were even more mysterious. Although he only had a slight idea of what they were here for, they troubled him. The rogue prisoned in MoonClan's camp had the malicious intent of hurting his kits. Not only that, but the second rogue they came upon said something troubling . . . and Icestar couldn't stop thinking about it.

Finally, the wind died down, and Flameheart kept up, nose pointed outward as he tried to catch the scent once more.

"This way!" he said, catching it at once. He whirled and followed the sharp yet unfamiliar cat scent. Icestar dashed after his friend, careful not to step on anything pointy or loud. They ducked beneath the cover of a large patch of tall and unruly grass and darted forward.

Flameheart's rusty orange pelt disappeared in the dark grass at once as he quickly followed the scent of the rogues. The only thing to be heard was the slight rustle of the plants he trampled, but other than that, his paws treaded on the earth as light as a feather, so one would have to listen really hard to hear him quickly padding through its cover.

Icestar followed the tip of Flameheart's tail, for that was all he could see through the grass. Flameheart was going too fast. Trying to keep up, Icestar trotted quicker, but before he could call out to his friend, Flameheart disappeared completely.

Icestar stopped in his tracks, ears pointed forward, then to his sides, but he couldn't hear a single thing at all.

Very quietly, he whispered, "Flameheart?"

There was no response, and Icestar didn't want to risk calling out to him any louder. *Mouse-dung*, he cursed under his breath. He tried to

pick up a scent. All he could smell was the tall grass. Both Flameheart's scent and the rogues' scent was masked by the strong odor of the grass, and he couldn't see a thing through this darkness. Where could he have gone?

Quietly, he pushed forward, making sure his steps were slow and cautious. The grass underneath his belly tickled him as went, and his mouth parted slightly, trying to pick up any other scent. It was still no use, for his sense of smell was blocked. How could Flameheart have disappeared so suddenly?

Frustrated, he pushed his way through the undergrowth and kept on walking forward, hoping he'd run into something, as long it was not a rogue. As he walked, impatience grew in his paws. *How far does this path lead*?

And more importantly, what was he going to run into? Was it something he shouldn't be seeing, or would it help him gain new information about the rogues?

He came to an abrupt stop when he heard something new. Somewhere to his right, the grass rustled, and he knew that some cat was close. He turned to the sound, ears pointed forward and jaws open as he tried to catch the scent of who it was. It could be Flameheart, but there was no telling through the thick patches of grass. Cautiously, he padded toward it as if the newcomer were a piece of prey.

"Icestar?" whispered the cat's voice.

Relief washed over his pelt as he recognized the voice of Flameheart. His friend's head poked through the weeds, the silhouette of his chin and ear-tips visible in the dim light.

"It's me!" replied Icestar quickly.

"I thought I'd lost you," his friend said breathlessly. "I turned around and you were gone! Well, that doesn't matter anymore. You won't believe what I found."

Icestar gulped. "Show me."

Flameheart nodded and sunk down into a hunter's crouch, snaking forward through the grass, this time much slower than before. *He's being cautious!* thought Icestar, sinking down to his belly as well. He followed close behind, his paw-steps light and his breath caught in his throat.

Whatever he was being cautious for, he knew it was dangerous. He wished to be back in camp right now, asleep under silverpelt's watchful gaze with the safe company of his Clanmates. Only Sharpfang knew that he and Flameheart had left the camp at night on this secret mission to find rogues. He wanted it to stay that way, and to keep his friends out of worry. But the thought of what he was about to find scared him, for it seemed that his worst fears were becoming true, and that this would have to involve the whole Clan.

Flameheart stopped walking and poked his head through a wall of grass. Icestar took a spot beside him and peeked through as well, ears forward and eyes alert. For a moment, all he could see was dark windswept grass, and a small empty clearing. He looked closer as the moon emerged from behind the clouds, casting light on the clearing down the slope, and he narrowed his eyes, catching a glint of fur shine.

"A rogue!" he whispered with alarm.

Flameheart shook his head. "Look closer."

Icestar's vision strained against the darkness, and he spotted a body right next to the first rogue, both sprawled in sleep. Then, on the other side of the clearing, another stirred within a small hole in the ground, and a fourth was curled up underneath a bush budding with fresh leaves.

"Four of them," he growled silently, trying to find more.

"Five," hissed Flameheart, pointing with his nose. Behind the small rock in the center of the clearing, he could see a shape of a cat stalking around its base, tail flicking and ears alert probably for intruders. Though his pelt was hard to see, he could recognize his large white paws and his light, almost playful, stance.

"That's—that's Jinx!" Icestar couldn't contain the shock, and his voice came out a little too loud.

Jinx's ears pricked, and the two toms slunk back into the cover of the undergrowth, hoping that they wouldn't be spotted. They listened to his light pawsteps slow to a halt.

*There's bound to be more*, Icestar thought with alarm, thinking that this group was too small to be true. *I know there are!*

Not a sound could be heard, and Icestar wondered what was going on. After a few heartbeats, he peeked through the grass again and spotted Jinx once more, standing on top of the rock with his eyes glaring straight up at the wall of grass. Then, for a long moment, their eyes met. He'd been spotted! The leader's pelt bristled with alarm.

"Fang, Rowan!" Jinx said loudly, "wake up! Intruders!"

"Fox-dung," snarled Icestar, and looked at Flameheart. "Don't run unless they show harm," he hissed, and shot his gaze back down to the clearing. Then he shouted, "We don't want to fight!"

*I can't leave with just knowing their rankings*, he decided. *I must know more!* He knew that if he was with a different Clanmate, they wouldn't agree to the danger of staying. Luckily, Flameheart was just as inclined to danger as Icestar was.

Jinx snarled. "Then why are you *watching* us in our sleep?" he demanded.

"We . . . we're Clan cats," Icestar said, fully emerging from the grass. Flameheart followed right after, taking his place beside the leader. "You rogues entered our territory and threatened one of our cats!"

"You mean that pretty ginger she-cat?" Jinx said, his tail flicking. "I only gave her a warning. Consider it helpful that I told her about the dangers that await. If anything, I could be saving her life!"

Flameheart growled. "There's no life-saving needed around here!"

"Oh yeah?" snarled a white tom cat, taking his place beside Jinx.

"Your lives will need saving after we're through with you!"

Both the tom's and Flameheart's pelts bristled, and their claws unsheathed.

Icestar stepped in front of his friend. "We won't risk battle here," he warned with a low growl. "Don't let their taunts provoke you. When it comes to it, we run. Not fight."

Flameheart's claws sheathed, but his pelt didn't smoothen. He seemed to be more bothered by the rogues than Icestar. The MoonClan leader decided to trust that his friend wouldn't get them into trouble, and stepped away from him, looking back down onto the rogues.

"What's the matter, Clan-kitty? Too scared for a fight?" snarled the white tom once more.

Flameheart held his ground, lifting his chin proudly into the air, but his eyes sparked with annoyance.

"We're here to find out who you are," Icestar said truthfully. "Not to fight."

"And where we come from, so that you could abandon your dying forest to take over ours," another cat growled. She was a young she-cat. The color of her pelt was hard to tell in the lighting, but her form was small. Perhaps if she were a Clan cat, she'd still be an apprentice. "You're probably the cat who's going to destroy us!"

The white tom's fur bristled. "Sunshine's right! We can't trust you!"

Icestar's fur bristled with unease and he stiffened. "You're wrong! There's no such thing!" He hoped that they didn't notice his discomfort, but the prophecy haunted his mind. He *was* the cat who destroyed, but he already played his role. That was supposed to be long gone now! And how do these cats even know about the prophecy? Has StarClan betrayed him, visiting a stranger's dream, putting the Clans in danger?

"How can you be so sure?" snarled a new cat, emerging from behind white tom. By the way they stepped out of his path, dipping their

heads with respect, he must be some form of a leader to them.

"Because perhaps . . . we can help you," Flameheart suddenly said.

Icestar was caught by surprise. What was Flameheart doing?

"And why would you do that?" the leader snarled. "If anything, any one of you could be our enemy!"

"We'd only help you because we don't want involvement," Flameheart snarled. "We especially don't want more trouble for our Clan. So we'll help you find your cat, if he even exists, and you can be on your way."

The leader's eyes narrowed. From up on the slope, Icestar could see him shift from paw to paw, interested yet undecided. "We won't accept your help so easily, Clan cats. We don't trust you."

A snarl emerged in Flameheart's throat, and Icestar grew even more uneasy.

"Then stay away from us!" Icestar said, his voice loud and clear. "We don't want trouble, but if it comes to it, we will fight you. Our Clan outranks your numbers!"

"And our forest cats outrank your Clan!" the white tom threatened.

"Hush, Fang," snarled the leader. The white tom, Fang, dipped his head in respect, and their tabby leader met Icestar's eyes with a harsh fire burning in them. "We will stay here as long as we need to, Clan cats. Our mission is much more important than the borders of your territory. We are not interested in your dying forest, either. We have one goal, and won't leave until we must!"

Icestar narrowed his eyes. "Then take this warning! If we find another rogue on our territory, they won't leave without a fight."

"Then so be it," he snarled in return. "Forest cats, attack!"

At their leader's cue, three of them charged up the slope, their claws outstretched and their teeth bared. Icestar's eyes widened. "Flameheart, run!"

He whirled around and shot through the tall grass, his heart pounding madly in his chest. Flameheart was by his side, and the two of them pelted through the long and unruly grass. The rogues hared after them, close behind their tails, ready for a fight.

*Dear StarClan, these cats are dangerous*! Icestar thought with horror as he ran from their bloodthirsty claws.

# a/n 2

I don't even know if anyone still wants to read my book. Lately I've been convinced I won't even finish it. If someone wants me to continue it, then I guess I'll take that into consideration. But I'm sorry if I've left all of you wondering of where my writing has gone. I'm sorry.

# Chapter Thirteen

**A/N: Hey guys. Thank you for all your supportive messages. I think you're all right; I WILL continue this book but there is no guarantee that I'll be able to finish it (although I'll try my best. Let's hope I do!!) . . . If it wasn't for the support I don't think I'd even WANT to continue. I really don't deserve such readers who are so good to me! I'm very grateful for you all . And now after a long, long wait, it's about time to give this book another try.**

**P.S, I re-re-edited the entirety of Icetail's Enemy and what I've written so far for The New Course, so a lot of name mistakes were eliminated, as well as grammar errors and things that simply didn't make sense. I'm pretty sure that the book is 90% mistake-proof now, but since we all know I'm infamous for making silly writing mistakes, there's probably still remnants of those left. But ahh who cares, you guys always fix those mistakes for me~**

**Now here's a long chapter for a good come back! ;)**

The moon glinted off tips of the long blades of grass as Icestar frantically shoved his way through, creating a path for him and Flameheart. Their paws beat hard against the ground, five others behind them in close pursuit. His mind whirled with thoughts of what to do.

*If I take them to MoonClan, we'll be able to beat them off with our ranks*! he thought. They were approaching his territory fast, and he had to decide quickly where he would lead Flameheart to escape. *No, no, I can't let them know where the camp is. If these cats find out about me, then they'll want to come back to kill me and hurt the Clan!* He remembered their threats about being from a larger group, and didn't want to risk the chance of not believing their taunts.

Frustrated, he aimlessly pelted through the grass in no particular direction, pushing his paws and legs to go faster. His chest ached

from the sudden rush of adrenaline, and his heart beat madly from a sense of danger he'd forgotten since the fall of DarkClan. The grass was becoming harder and harder to push through as he ran.

"They're gaining on us!" Flameheart breathlessly yowled, his frantic eyes meeting with Icestar's.

Their exchange didn't last long, for one of the rogues had leaped right in between the two with outstretched claws and barred fangs. It was the younger she-cat amongst them. She turned to Icestar and bowled into him without warning, tackling him to the ground before he could react. Icestar took no time to hesitate and immediately started kicking. His eyes were turned to the dirt; he couldn't see a thing, but he felt that the she-cat was light. Her build and weight felt a lot like Amberwind's—small and lean, but swift like a moor cat. He hissed at her as she tried raking his claws at him, but she missed every blow, giving him an opportunity to push her off with one final kick. With a gasp of surprise, she tumbled off his body and he scrambled onto his paws. Another rogue tackled right into his direction the moment he stood up, but he was more prepared this time and rolled out of the way in a swift motion.

His eyes found Flameheart ahead of him, running away from three other rogues who were in close pursuit of him. Icestar didn't hesitate for another second and pelted from his spot in the direction of his friend. The other two rogues, recovering onto their paws, broke into a run after him.

The adrenaline pumping through Icestar's blood was so intense that his thoughts became a blur. His body took over instinctually, pushing to get towards Flameheart and then to safety. The she-cat rogue behind him was so close now that he could practically feel her breath on his tail, but he didn't let that faze him and focused on regrouping with his friend to save him from trouble.

Unlike Icestar, Flameheart only had one life. There was a chance that he wouldn't be returning to the camp tonight if they didn't find a solution, and fast!

The three rogues behind Flameheart were gaining on him. The rusty orange tom obviously seemed tired, losing his energy fast. He pelted

as quick as he could, but Icestar could see that his tail was drooping and his mouth was wide open, gasping for air. A second later, he came crashing down to the ground, tripping over his own paws. One of the three rogues jumped on top of him and the other two stood on either side of him as if creating a barrier around his struggling body. Icestar's heart tightened—he was so far away and the three rogues had their teeth barred and claws outstretched, ready to kill.

*Flameheart!*

But Icestar didn't seem to speed up. Time felt slow as he frantically raced to get to his best friend. *I won't reach him in time to save him!* he thought desperately.

And just like that, a shadow leaped out from the tall surrounding grass. A cat tumbled onto Flameheart's attacker and ripped him off the MoonClan cat's body, sending him rolling to the side. Two other cats leaped out of the grass and tackled the other two rogues before they could react, engaging in battle almost immediately. The tension in Icestar's heart didn't release until he saw who their saviors were—CloudClan cats! He skidded to a halt, astonished at their impeccable timing.

Among the other two CloudClan warriors was Grassheart, who was fiercely clawing at the rogue leader's face as he held him down with his weight. Flameheart, looking just as stunned as Icestar felt, gazed toward the MoonClan leader's direction. His eyes widened. "Icestar, look out!"

Icestar gasped as a weight crushed him from the top of his spine. "Oof!"

"You won't get away this time!" the rogue she-cat snarled fiercely as she raked her claws along his neck.

He hissed in pain and thrashed forward, sending her flying in front of him. Flameheart dashed to his side and pinned down the tom behind him angrily.

"Well, well, look who's willing to fight now!" shouted Jinx as

Flameheart threw a blow at his ears. "I didn't like you the moment I laid eyes on you!"

"I didn't like you the moment you opened your dirty little mouth," hissed Flameheart in response. Icestar knew he was talking about when they first saw him in the forest during Amberwind's warrior assessment. "We didn't want a fight, but you asked for it!"

Icestar tore his attention away from them as they started landing attacks on one another and looked to the she-cat ahead of him, who was already back on her paws and waiting to strike again. This time, instead of leaping directly on him, her eyes were narrowed to slits as she watched him intensely. Her fur was bristled and she was in a fighting stance.

He returned her gaze and flattened his ears in response to her hostility.

So far, he collected that these rogues were not battle-trained like Clan cats, but they *did* know how to fight, likely due to the same reasons why the Clan cats fought. He couldn't help but wonder what their forests were like and how they actually knew about the prophecy as well. It was all a mystery to him, including on how they found the Clan territories in the first place, and why they acted so violently. He observed her figure carefully, knowing that her fighting him would be futile. After all, he was much bigger, stronger, and more experienced than she was when it came to battle. He could tell that she knew it from the scars on his pelt. Despite her hostility, she seemed like a frightened kit putting up a front!

"Call off your friends," he said at last, making her jump with surprise, as if she was expecting an attack.

For a second she was about to spout back a response, but she bit her tongue and instead tilted her head. "And why would I do that?"

"If you value your life I would suggest calling them off," he threatened, stretching out his claws. Icestar knew that the rogues no longer had the advantage. He took a warning step forward, and she took a step back in response.

Her eyes flicked across his body, observing the scars and experience that spread across his fur before gulping. He felt bad for being so intimidating to a cat that could be as young as an apprentice, but he had no choice but to use any means possible to protect his Clanmate —and now the CloudClan cats, too, who were risking their lives for the sake of Icestar and Flameheart. He didn't want any cat to die today, no Clan cat nor rogue, for it would surely stir up trouble.

He took another step closer to the she-cat, his fur bristling to make him seem larger and more threatening. "Well? Are you going to call them off?"

Her eyes were round with fear as she stared at him. "A-alright, fine! But don't regret letting us go. Rowan!" She turned to her leader, who was still locked in battle with Grassheart. "Rowan, let's leave now while we still have a chance!"

Rowan broke free from Grassheart and took a few steps back, panting heavily. He turned to the young she-cat, his gaze sharp and questioning. "Why would you say—"

His words were cut short when he caught sight of the situation. Both sides of the fight were evenly matched, but the Clan cats were obviously winning. Flameheart had Jinx pinned down, and the two other CloudClan warriors had the advantage between their own fights. Even the she-cat was in a tough situation—she was no match for her opponent and it would cost her life if they wanted to carry out this fight.

*He'll surely have to call off the fight!* Icestar thought with hope.

Icestar and Rowan met gazes, staring intently and threateningly at one another. Both were leaders, or at least, Icestar assumed he was a leader. This meant that both cats had to make tough decisions in these situations. If Rowan cared anything for his comrades, then he would call off the fight.

*Just what kind of rogues are they?* Icestar wondered, anxiously waiting for Rowan's answer.

Finally, their leader took a deep breath and called out: "Forest cats,

we're leaving!" The fighting immediately stopped, and his companions looked up to him with shock. "We'll let you have it tonight, Clan cats. But know this—the next time we cross paths again, blood will be shed."

"Don't cross into our territory next time!" Grassheart shot back in response.

Rowan sneered at him and started stalking away. The young she-cat slipped past Icestar and pelted by her leader's side, followed by Jinx, who was reluctantly let go by Flameheart, and the two other rogues who stalked towards the back of the group. Icestar watched them all go until they disappeared from their line of vision in the distance, and the tension in his body loosened, letting in both the exhaustion and fear that he'd pushed away.

He let out a deep breath of relief and felt his legs shake. His paws almost gave out until he felt another cat immediately by his side for support—Grassheart.

"It looks like the two of you are much too exhausted to travel back to the forest in these conditions, Icestar," he meowed knowingly, his eyes flicking in between the two MoonClan cats. "You should stay the night in CloudClan. It's the least we can do for you."

Icestar purred as he steadied himself on his paws. "Thank you for the offer, but . . ."

He stopped short from his speech when he saw the two other CloudClan warriors approaching from behind Grassheart. He recognized Smallfeather—one of the cats who opposed the friendship between MoonClan and CloudClan—and Galestorm, an older she-cat warrior that he recognized from occasional gatherings. He dipped his head to them gratefully, but he could practically feel the fumes coming off of Smallfeather.

"This isn't right, Grassheart! We can't keep risking our lives for MoonClan, you know!" the little calico she-cat snapped.

Grassheart didn't turn his gaze away from Icestar. "You know it is the will of StarClan for us to be allies."

"Was it the will of StarClan for my mother to die?" Her voice came out as a hiss, making Icestar feel uneasy. He didn't intend for the night to be used to cause trouble, but he could tell that this she-cat didn't hate MoonClan without reason. Something in him wanted to apologize to her, but another part knew that it would be best to simply remain silent in this situation.  He'd already stirred up trouble with the rogues, and he did not want to start having trouble with their closest ally.

*And plus*, he thought to himself, *she reminds me a lot of myself when I was around that age . . .*

Her anger was evident by her conduct and the way she stood, paws spread apart as if always feeling threatened, body tense and head bent down in frustration. He knew that her mind was wrapped around herself and her griefs, fresh with pain and sorrow and anger. To feel this way must be the result of losing a loved one in an unexpected, unforgiving way. Like Featherbreeze, Softpelt, Sparrowheart, Vinetail, Brighstar, Dewstar . . . and countless other cats who had died twisting up their fates in the prophecy of darkness. All cats who had left Icestar's life tragically, those he missed every single day and night, became not a source of anger for him, but a source of strength to serve the Clan wholeheartedly. And somehow, in that way, Smallfeather's uncanny resemblance to Icestar's younger self moved his heart with pity.

He dipped his head to her. "I'm sorry about the loss of your mother. Despite this, thank you for helping Flameheart and I with fighting off the rogues. We wouldn't have escaped without your help."

For a moment her eyes widened, and then her ears flattened with embarrassment. "Save your breath! If StarClan never sent that stupid dream to Swiftstar, we wouldn't have helped you in the first place. Plus, you're on *our* territory! We weren't helping *you*, we were chasing off the rogues!"

*Is she talking about the Battle?* he wondered, remembering Swiftstar's story on why CloudClan had joined MoonClan's fight against DarkClan. Her rudeness did not affect him at all, but her words made him more curious.

Grassheart stepped in front of the young warrior with disapproval. "I'm sorry about her, Icestar. She really doesn't mean it."

"I meant every word," she hissed, padding around Grassheart to come face-to-face with Icestar. "Why did you even make me come on this stupid patrol? MoonClan doesn't deserve our help anymore. It looks like they're doing just fine in the forest, so why don't you just—"

Galestorm cleared her throat with disapproval and stepped in front of the young warrior once more. "Enough, Smallfeather!"

This made her silent.

Galestorm looked up to Icestar apologetically. "I'm sorry about her. Smallfeather just doesn't know when to grow up."

He heard a snort of annoyance come from behind Galestorm, and Flameheart let out a *mrrow* of laughter. Icestar couldn't share the same joy. He knew what it felt like to be teased when you just wanted to be understood. He sighed and looked up at Galestorm and Grassheart with tired eyes. "It's no issue. Thank you again for saving us when you did, though. Despite Smallfeather being so opposed to us, she fought bravely. I am impressed beyond words."

For a second, there was silence, before a loud, "Humph!" from Smallfeather came as a response.

Galestorm sighed as Grassheart's whiskers twitched with amusement. He stepped up closer to Icestar and Flameheart, eyes bright under the moonlight. "Well anyways, it's late. I really want you to come back with me to CloudClan to stay the night; we're only a short ways away from the camp. There you can eat and rest up and tell Swiftstar about your encounter with the rogues. We only knew you were here because one of our warriors on the night watch saw the grass shifting closer and closer to our campsite. We had a feeling that it could be the rogues. If we don't return soon, they'll send more cats after us."

Icestar thought about it for a moment. If he didn't return to his own camp tonight, he knew his Clanmates would be worried in the

morning to find their leader and Flameheart gone. But he shouldn't ignore Swiftstar's wishes to talk especially after his warriors had saved the MoonClan cats from a close death, twice now, if counting the battle that happened no less than three moons ago. *I have to make sure to return at first light if I want to spend the night at CloudClan*, he thought, weighing the decisions carefully in his mind. He *was* tired, and he *was* hungry. The mere thought of trekking all the way back to MoonClan made his stomach turn and paws feel heavier.

*I suppose one night away from the camp wouldn't hurt*, he thought, exchanging a knowing glance with Flameheart. His friend seemed to be thinking the same thing. They nodded to each other and Icestar turned back to Grassheart.

"Thank you for your kindness, Grassheart," he meowed at last with with a purr. "We'll gladly accept your offer."

* * *

"I'm happy we were able to help you, Icestar," meowed the CloudClan leader with a dip of his head. "You're a precious friend of the Clan. Countless times before, you had also helped us."

Icestar smiled. "Nonsense. We help each other. Thank you for risking to save us, by the way."

"You would do it for us in a heartbeat," Grassheart said with confidence.

Flameheart purred at the kindness of the CloudClan warriors, and Icestar dipped his head in return to the three, including Echoleaf, CloudClan's deputy.

When they had entered the camp earlier, most cats were already awake since they had heard the news of rogues invading the territory. The Clan watched the patrol wearily upon seeing MoonClan cats, and as usual, the younger ones, including apprentices and kits, seemed stirred up and excited. The warriors, however, muttered silently to one another, making Icestar feel self-conscious and ambushed to be in the heart of a camp that wasn't

his. It's only natural for the Clan to act so guarded around him, though. They'd suffered greatly from the losses of the Dark Battle, too, and nobody but a few cats like Smallfeather and her friends seemed to actually voice their opinions about it and the closeness of their Clan to MoonClan.

*I have to show them that there's nothing to be afraid about*, he thought as he stared at Swiftstar's face. *The last thing I should do now is cause trouble!*

"So now that you're settled in, I'd like for you to tell me more about the rogues," the CloudClan leader said, laying down on his nest.

Icestar felt the burning gazes of the whole Clan on his back. He learned that everyone slept outside, rarely in their own dens. He wished that he was back in the privacy of the Moonrock. He cleared his throat nervously before speaking. "Well, Flameheart and I wanted to learn some things about the rogues in case they actually posed a threat. So we tracked down their camp and—"

"So do they?" Echoleaf interjected. "Pose a threat, I mean?"

Icestar thought of what to say, but his words felt jumbled up due to the pressure of the Clan. He knew that he was far enough from them so that they wouldn't be able to pick up on his conversation, but he still wished that they were somewhere private to talk.

Flameheart seemed notice this and cleared his throat. "They seem to be. They're not here to steal our prey or steal our territory," he informed, observing the puzzled faces of the CloudClan cats. "So far we've run into six rogues—one's being held prisoner in our territory, and the other five sleep just beyond the outskirts of our two territories. We thought that we could discover who they really were, but . . ."

"Evidently, they caught you," Swiftstar finished with a nod. "Have you figured out their purpose?"

Flameheart opened his mouth again but no words came out. He shared a glance with Icestar, and the MoonClan leader in turn looked away and back to Swiftstar, Echoleaf, and Grassheart.

"We're still trying to figure that out," Icestar said at last.

*They can't know about the prophecy*, he thought to himself. *I can't tell anyone that they're here to find* me*!*

Echoleaf looked between the two with suspicion. "Are you sure about that?"

Flameheart nodded quickly. "We're sure."

"So if they're not here for prey, territory, or anything like that, what *could* they be here for?" she wondered out loud. "There's nothing much to gain from approaching the Clans with a small group of rogues."

"And that leads to another thing," Icestar said quickly, glad to be off the previous topic. "We don't believe they're a small group. All the rogues we've encountered so far call themselves the Forest Cats, as if they come from a group that is bigger than we know."

"What?" hissed Swiftstar. "How can you be sure of this?"

"We're not," the MoonClan leader murmured, already forgetting the staring eyes of the CloudClan cats. "But I'm sure of one thing: they won't leave us until they get what they want."

* * *

"It's scary to think that the Clans are still being threatened, even *after* the defeat of DarkClan," murmured Grassheart as the two silently padded away from the leader's nest. "It's like it never ends, you know?"

Flameheart shuddered. "It's like the Clans aren't ready to find peace yet."

"Nonsense," Icestar whispered. *It's my fault they're here, it's always my fault*, he thought sadly as they took a piece of prey from the fresh-kill pile: a rabbit to share among the three of them. *They're here to find me. Because of the prophecy. This isn't fair! I thought this was all over . . .*

Flameheart nudged his side. "Are you okay, Icestar? Why don't you take the first bite?"

Icestar snapped out of his thoughts to meet his friend's concerned gaze. He mustered out a purr. "I'm fine. I'd rather Grassheart take the first bite. He deserves it, for his help and all."

Grassheart licked his chest with embarrassment. "I was only doing what any of you would do. But thank you." He bend down and took a piece of the rabbit's leg, motioning for the other two to start eating their share as well.

The three cats worked on their prey for a little while, before Flameheart let out a long and obvious yawn. "I'm beat."

"The apprentices laid out some nests for the two of you by the warriors," Grassheart said, pointing his nose to one end of the camp. Icestar turned to look at it and observed. He wasn't used to seeing so many cats laying outside in the clearing at once. It looked like they were a bunch of fish, if anything, caught by the cats of StreamClan and laid out in the sun to dry. Except the sight was much warmer and comforting than the peculiarity of it all.

Flameheart's reaction was similar. "So you don't sleep in dens at all?" he asked with astonishment.

"Why do we need to sleep in dens when we can sleep under our ancestors?" Grassheart asked in return.

"What about when it rains?"

He beckoned to a large den on the adjacent side of the camp. "Most of us will sleep in there. The nursery and medicine den have their own spaces, of course. But warriors, apprentices, and elders share a space when needed." He paused. "I remember that everyone slept in separate dens based on their position in the Clan at MoonClan. Here, we all prefer to sleep together where StarClan can see us."

"I'll find my nest, then," Flameheart said with a smile, padding off to find the two nests a bit separate from the rest. He took his spot and laid down in a tight ball, tucking his nose into his tail before closing

his eyes to fall asleep.

Grassheart turned to Icestar. "And what about you?"

Icestar remembered feeling heavy and tired earlier, but the feeling had completely washed away due to his anxieties. The thought of his Clan's safety being threatened again made him feel too bad to sleep. He turned to Grassheart. "I'll stay awake a bit longer."

"Then I will too," meowed his old friend. "I think Windcloud and the kits are still up by the nursery. Would you like to see them and meet my kits?"

Icestar missed his own mate and kits back in MoonClan. He shrugged. "Sure. I haven't seen Windcloud since before the Dark Battle, anyway."

"Follow me," Grassheart said, beckoning him forward with his tail.

The CloudClan warrior led him towards what seemed to be the nursery: a burrow in the ground farthest away from the camp entrance. The kits weren't inside, though. As expected, they all lay peacefully outside, some asleep and others awake and talking. They were around the same age of Sharpfang's kits, born before the Battle, close to being at the apprenticeship age. His eyes widened as he counted.

"Five kits!"

Grassheart laughed. "They're less of a handful than you think."

Icestar couldn't imagine having so many kits. In MoonClan, he'd only seen litters up to four, and he'd heard of a number as big as seven in some other Clan when he was still a kit himself. Still, the number of five kits made him grateful that he only had two. He couldn't imagine how much work they must've been!

They stopped in front of the group and Icestar dipped his head a bit nervously. Windcloud's head immediately popped up. "Icestar! I haven't seen you since you were still Icetail," she purred with excitement, standing up to touch noses with him. "I didn't think we'd be allowed to say hi to you. Some cats obviously think

befriending an enemy Clan is wrong."

"I don't think it's wrong," Icestar said with the same friendly tone. "Why don't you introduce me to the kits?"

"Right," she said, turning around. "Well, Airkit's asleep, but the other four are awake. Kits, come introduce yourselves!"

Grassheart purred and sat beside his mate as the kits piled up towards Icestar curiously. He watched them as they sat each down in front of him, their pelts barely visible in the light of Starpelt. He could tell that two of them had ginger coats; one of them, a she-kit, had a coat such a dark ginger that he knew it would be red in the daylight. The other two in front of him had coats similar to brown, and the one still sleeping, Airkit, seemed like a pale cream color with dark paws.

"I'm Silentkit," the dark ginger one said.

"And I'm Skykit!" the other ginger she-kit exclaimed. "We're the only she-kits. But those are our brothers—"

"I can introduce myself," snapped the one on the far left. He turned his nose up in the air proudly. "I'm Flykit. Nice to meet you, Icestar."

Icestar turned to the last one. "And what's your name?"

The kit narrowed his eyes. "Why should I tell a *MoonClan cat* my name? They're not our friends! They're nothing but foxhearts who can't take care of their own Clan!"

Icestar jolted back in astonishment at the kit's rudeness. So the warriors weren't the only ones who felt opposed to the friendship between MoonClan and CloudClan. It was even the *kits*.

His siblings looked at their brother in shock as Grassheart growled. "Stemkit! Where are your manners?"

"Why show manners to the enemy?" he hissed. "Even if it's a Clan leader, I'm only loyal to CloudClan!"

"That doesn't mean you should speak like that," his mother said disapprovingly. "You're to be nice to *all* cats. Even cats from other Clans."

Stemkit snorted. "That's not true! MoonClan is full of a bunch of rogues and DarkClan cats! You can't trust them, even Icestar."

Icestar stared at the kit evenly, unaffected by his words and yet also a bit agitated. He held his mouth tightly shut, words threatening to spill out.

"If it wasn't for Icestar, we'd be *dead*, Stemkit." Windcloud stepped up and looked at him with anger blazing in his eyes. "You must apologize to him right now!"

The kit didn't seem to grasp the importance of what she just said. "If it wasn't for CloudClan, his Clan would be gone anyway!"

"And what do you know about that?" his mother demanded.

"Anything that Swallowfur told me is the truth," he shot back.

Icestar was the one to step up this time, for he couldn't contain his agitation any longer. He didn't know why, but he felt the strong urge to justify himself. He didn't like the fact that CloudClan's split of opinions has gone as far as to the kits. He cleared his throat, catching their attention. "I'm sorry you feel that way, Stemkit. But it's not like that at all. If CloudClan hadn't helped us in the Dark Battle, StarClan willing, then DarkClan would have conquered CloudClan after destroying MoonClan. You would not be here to this day."

Stemkit was silent.

"And a kit should never fight back with his own mother, you hear?"

There was a long pause between the group. The only sound that Icestar could hear was the socked murmuring of the other three kits, glancing between their brother and the MoonClan leader with both fear and excitement in their eyes.

"Do you hear, Stemkit?" Icestar repeated.

"Yes, Icestar," he muttered with both frustration and embarrassment, before getting up to pad to his nest.

Windcloud's eyes widened as her son laid down, his back turned to the warriors. "Wow! I've never seen him so obedient before."

"Icestar's always been amazing," Grassheart said. "I'm sorry about him, though. Thank you for being so patient."

"I understand what he's so upset about," murmured Icestar, thinking about Swallowfur and Smallfeather. If their ideologies were spreading to other members of the Clan, including the *kits*, then MoonClan might not even have CloudClan's help in the future if the forest cats really were a threat to his Clan. He knew that he shouldn't involve them in any more problems if it meant keeping things friendly.

*From now on we should be strong on our own*, he thought with a yawn. *Anything for the sake of MoonClan*.

"Well, anyways, you've met the kits. You're starting to look tired," Grassheart observed. "Ready to sleep?"

"Yes," he said without hesitation.

"Aw, but Grassheart!" Silentkit exclaimed, bursting up from her spot. "We've barely just met him!" She turned to Icestar. "I've never met another Clan cat before. Please, can you stay?"

Icestar chuckled. Despite her name, she was very loud indeed.

Grassheart shook his head. "No, Silentkit. We've all had a long night. You should go to sleep too."

She sighed with defeat and turned around to her nest, followed by her brother and sister. Before she laid down, she called out, "I'll see you at the gathering in a few moons, Icestar!"

He dipped his head and looked at Grassheart. "She'll be an apprentice soon?"

"In less than two moons," Grassheart replied proudly. "Anyway, let

me show you to your nest before we lose more time to sleep. Come, this way."

He took Icestar to the nest beside Flameheart, which was only a few whiskers away from all the other warriors. Some stared, specifically Smallfeather and Swallowfur. Their eyes glinted angrily in the moonlight. Icestar tried to shrug it off as he laid down on his makeshift nest, finding it surprisingly warm and comfortable against the cool newleaf air. Grassheart said his goodbyes and clambered off to his own nest, taking a place besides a few other senior warriors before drifting off into a quiet snore.

Lost in thought, Icestar turned onto his back so that his belly faced the sky, and stared at the stars of Silverpelt with half-open eyes. With a quiet mind, watching the stars from a place that wasn't MoonClan made it all seem new to him. All his thoughts about everything slowly washed away, and he even soon forgot that he was being watched.

He observed each and every one of his ancestors in the swirling milky patterns, bright with different colors and sizes. With every breath, he thought about his ancestors and wondered if they were watching him right now, wondering if they were protecting him and the Clan. Each twinkling star could be his mother or father or Brightstar or maybe even Dewstar. The spectacle made him feel calm, small and insignificant by its captivating wonder.

That night, his mind was free from all worries and anxieties about the rogues, the prophecies, CloudClan, or even his Clan's well-being. With the sweet and open scent of the moor in his lungs, he fell into a deep and tranquil sleep under the vast night sky.

# Chapter Fourteen

Ravenkit was up at dawn.

She pried herself apart from her mother's side carefully before sleepily clambering up onto her paws and arched her back into a long stretch, followed by a luxurious yawn. She stretched out her front legs, letting her little thorn-like claws unsheathe and reach out until she felt satisfied, fully awake and ready to start a fresh new day.

*Silverleaf's not up yet*, she thought as she glanced at her mother's silhouette. Silverleaf snored slowly and silently, her breath a comforting feeling on Ravenkit's moss-covered fur. Dewkit, snoring right beside her, always slept on his back, tilting toward their mother's belly. *What a kit!* she scoffed in her mind. Despite always waking up by their mother's belly, Ravenkit always chose a spot that was further away from them. In any way possible, she had to prove she was independent. *Like Berrykit and Shadekit!*

She turned to where the two shared a nest. Since Sagepelt didn't sleep in the nursery anymore, they slept alone and she longed to be like them. Swiftbreeze and Smokekit slept close to Silverleaf's nest, while Goldsun, the newest queen, had her own nest on the far other end of the den, where she was also found sleeping peacefully like all the others.

Ravenkit finally spotted Berrykit fast asleep on her side as she peered over Silverleaf's body, the older kit's flank peacefully rising and falling as she snored. As the black-furred kit looked around to find Shadekit as well, she realized that he was not in the nursery.

*I wonder where he went off to?* she wondered, turning her gaze to the den's small entrance. Pale light filtered through, allowing little warmth to wash in along with fresh a newleaf breeze. Silverleaf wouldn't like the idea of Ravenkit leaving the den, especially since she was still in trouble for the fiasco she'd caused a quarter-moon ago. But the queen was asleep and wouldn't notice Ravenkit gone.

*No one can stop me!*

She happily trotted out of the den, ducking below the entrance before clambering out into the clearing. As soon as she saw how empty it was, she realized that it was still very early. The only cats awake were Sharpfang, Nightrose, and Fireshade, who all sat around the leader's den speaking in hushed whispers. Rainwhisker stood guard by the rogue, who didn't seem as scary as he does when awake. She spotted Shadekit sitting a few whiskers away from the leader's den, licking his paw calmly before drawing it over his ear. She approached him gingerly so that the older cats wouldn't notice her presence.

"Shadekit!" she said. "Psst, Shadekit!"

His head whipped around at the sound of his name, and when he spotted Ravenkit, his eyes narrowed. "Oh, it's you."

"Yeah, it's me," she retorted back quickly. "Anyways, what are you doing out here alone?"

Though his gray fur was already neatly groomed, he continued to draw his tongue over his chest.

Ravenkit's nose flared. "Hey! Don't ignore me!"

He looked up. "And why do I owe you an answer, little *kit*?"

Her eyes widened. How dare he insult her like that? Does he think that she wants nothing more than to play like a kit? He had to understand how much older and more mature she'd become from everything she'd done. Clearing her throat, she tried to shake off the feeling of agitation and offense. "Well, yeah. We're Clanmates! And I'm just curious. What's the harm?"

"Clearly," he said, "you are."

His eyes motioned to the hole that was finally patched up and strengthened by the nursery, a mistake that Ravenkit had made so casually trying to break the warrior code. She felt heat rising to her face.

"Th-that was just a mistake!" she exclaimed in defense. "Don't tell me you've never wanted to see the forest?"

Shadekit thought for a moment, making Ravenkit's heart beat anxiously. She felt targeted by him, the embarrassment of her mistakes easily rushing back to her. Finally, he leaned closer, eyes narrowed menacingly, beckoning forward with his tail. She gulped and complied, leaning closer and tilting her ear towards him.

"Oh I've *seen* the forest, Ravenkit. But not like you have." The tone of his whisper made it feel like he was showing off, teasing her further. She tried to shrink back but she couldn't, now knowing that Shadekit had broken the warrior code, too, and it didn't seem like he was caught for it. "You see, only special kits get to go out into the forest with special permission. StarClan sends a dream to either the leader or deputy, telling them to bring a selected kit out into the forest."

"I-I don't understand!" she interjected, shaking her head. "How come I've never heard this before?"

"Because you're not special," he said. "You or Dewkit aren't special. But StarClan told the leader and deputy to take me out into the forest *many* times. I've seen the forest as much as an apprentice can see it."

"H-how?" she exclaimed, eyes widening desperately. "How do you become a special kit? If I become one, maybe Icestar can forgive me!" *And maybe I can finally see the forest!* she thought.

"Shh! Keep your voice down," he hissed. "I can't tell you how. StarClan chooses on their own, you know. And clearly you won't ever be chosen. You put your brother and your Clanmates at risk. Maybe your apprenticeship ceremony will even be delayed."

Ravenkit shook her head again, this time with disbelief. "No, I'll *ask* Icestar how!"

As she stood up to rush to the leader's den, Shadekit ran ahead of her and blocked her path. "No, you can't tell them you know about this! It's a secret. Nobody knows about it but the leaders and

deputies."

"And clearly *you* know," she shot back, shoving him out the way with the force of her two front paws. She surprisingly stumbled past him despite the fact that he was bigger and stronger than her, and raced as fast as she could to the leader's den. "Icestar! Icestar!"

Shadekit grabbed for her tail, but it slid through his paws as she ran away. "Come back here, Ravenkit!"

As she bolted around the den and then through the entrance, she stopped short in her tracks to see that he wasn't there. Shadekit stopped at her side at an instant as he saw that Icestar wasn't in his den as well, shoulders dropping with relief at the sight.

*He must've already woken up!* Ravenkit decided, turning heel and trotting through the entrance.

She was immediately stopped by a tall figure in front of her, looking down with anger. "Ravenkit, Shadekit," Sharpfang said coldly, narrowing his eyes. "What are you doing in the leader's den?"

"I-I needed to talk to my father—"

"Just because you're the leader's kit doesn't mean you can so casually do that, Ravenkit. And I'm guessing Shadekit was trying to stop you." The deputy's eyes turned to his son.

Ravenkit fumed at the deputy's bias towards his son. "That's no fair! He entered Icestar's den the same as me!" she exclaimed, but then shrunk back when Sharpfang gave her a long and hard stare.

"Go back to your mother, Ravenkit. Don't cause us trouble so early in the morning."

"But where's Icestar?" she demanded.

Sharpfang barred his teeth. "Don't be so stubborn! This is no way to talk to your deputy, Ravenkit! I ought to tell Icestar to revoke your apprenticeship ceremony, given how kit-like you are."

*I'm such an idiot*! she thought as she blinked back the wetness in her eyes. *Every time I act on my own accordance, I mess everything up*!

Trembling, she spoke up again. "But that's not fair! It's not fair at all!" Ravenkit gasped, trying her best to hold it together. "I still have three or four moons—you can't make that decision now—"

"Oh yes, yes I can," he hissed, ushering the black kit out of the leader's den. "Now *go* before I stick you to the apprentice duties."

Shadekit watched as she stumbled back to the nursery, his eyes cold and unfeeling. She shot him a long and hard glance, knowing well that he could have stuck up for her. But of course he didn't! Shadekit never stood up for anything in his life. He's his father's kit, all right. She's never met a bigger meanie in her life.

Unable to bring herself to the darkness of the nursery, she sat outside and slumped down. Her wounds were all healed now, but Silverleaf had been strict, especially with the rogue in their camp, and she was never allowed to play. There was nothing she could do that could pass the time, except stare at the pale sky as it slowly transitioned to pink and orange against the tree-tops. Taking a deep breath, she shut her eyes and listened to the morning birds whistle as they woke, calming her racing heart.

Her ears pricked as she heard the sounds of the warriors' voices.

"He hasn't returned, Sharpfang. And Flameheart's gone with him!" Nightrose said abruptly. "We haven't seen them since yesterday, but their scents are fresh from moon-high."

Ravenkit's eyes cracked open, and she could see them still hovering by the leader's den as they spoke. The deputy and two other warriors stood closely but not secretively. Shadekit was sitting underneath the shadow of the leader's den a few whiskers away from Sharpfang, nonchalantly licking his paw and drawing it over his ear.

She sneered. What a mouse-heart.

"I know," Sharpfang said in reply to Nightrose's concern. "Give him

time. I'm sure he will return soon—"

With that, the camp entrance rustled, and in came the familiar shape of Icestar, followed closely by Flameheart. Despite supposedly being out for the night, he seemed alert and well-rested. Ravenkit couldn't help herself and burst from her spot, rushing up to her father as soon as she saw him.

"What do you think you're doing?" Sharpfang snapped as soon as she ran past him.

But he couldn't stop her in time before she pressed herself against Icestar's chest, burying her face in his fur like a little kit would. He jumped with surprise, but didn't scold her.

"Ravenkit! What are you doing up so early?" he asked gently.

"Icestar, am I a special kit?" she mewed, softly so that Shadekit couldn't hear. She looked up at his amber eyes.

He tilted his head. "What are you talking about?"

"I-I just wanted to know." She felt embarrassed that she'd even asked.

Icestar pondered for a second before his whiskers twitched, and he drew his tongue behind her ear. "Of course you are, Ravenkit. The most special of them all."

Pleased with his answer, Ravenkit purred and pressed her nose to the warmth of his chest again before pulling away to look at Shadekit with triumphant eyes. But the older kit wasn't even watching; he had turned away and vanished behind the leader's den, probably avoiding her gaze.

"Icestar," Sharpfang said from behind Ravenkit. She whirled around and looked up at him, scared that he would tell him about revoking Ravenkit's apprenticeship ceremony. But his eyes weren't on the kit. Instead, he looked stern, observing the leader with all the seriousness one could muster. "What did you discover while out?"

Icestar shut his eyes, and Ravenkit drew in a quick breath. They

were talking about warrior business in front of her!

"We found them all right," Flameheart said from behind the leader. "The rogues, I mean." He padded up to Icestar's side, eyes flicking down to Ravenkit briefly before looking back up to Sharpfang. "We're lucky we even escaped. StarClan must have been watching; CloudClan came in just at the nick of time and saved us!"

"They attacked you?" Sharpfang snarled with alarm.

Icestar solemnly nodded. "They did. There were five of them, so we ran. But they're fast, Sharpfang. Almost as fast as a moor cat, and strong too. It is as if they're warriors!"

Ravenkit pressed close to her father, imagining the horror he must have been through. After all, she'd been chased by one of those scary cats before! Her eyes landed on the rogue in the middle of the camp, and she wondered if the rest of them were like him: tattered fur, sharpened claws, and a bloodlust one could sense from a distance away. She imagined the five rogue chasing Icestar all the way to CloudClan's moors and shuddered. They could've ripped all of his nine lives away if he'd been caught!

"What else did you figure out?" Sharpfang asked. "Are they like our prisoner?"

"No," he replied instantly. "Not at all. Like warriors, I tell you. They even say they have a clan—err, a *group* of cats in some distant forest from here. They called themselves the forest cats."

Her fur bristled and she couldn't hold in her voice any longer. "They could start a war with us, Icestar! If we don't give them what they want, they'll be another DarkClan!"

"They were probably lying," Icestar said.

"But they *smelled* like a forest," Flameheart interjected quickly. "You know, when the winds come from the direction of the dawn sun. It's faint, but it's there, and these cats definitely came from there. Something brought them to us—"

"Hush, Flameheart! Not in front of my kit," Icestar snapped. He

pulled apart from Ravenkit and leveled his height with her, giving her stern eyes. "Go to your mother now."

"But Icestar!"

"Go," he ordered, nosing her toward the nursery. "Something must be done about this. You're not old enough to listen."

Knowing that it was pointless to argue, she sighed and padded back to the nursery, sitting at the entrance with no enthusiasm whatsoever. Her eyes watched the camp silently as the warriors stirred to life, woken up by the warm dawn light and the chirping of the birds.

* * *

Ravenkit stubbornly sat at her spot for the whole morning, even when Silverleaf tried to convince her to join her and Dewkit inside the den for fresh-kill. She watched as Sharpfang sent out the hunting patrols and border patrols, adding more warriors than usual so as to be alert for the rogues that lurk the territories. She watched as Sweetheart scampered to and fro from the elder's den and then to the warrior's den before finally coming to the nursery to check up on the newest queen. She watched Bloodpaw clean out the bedding from his den and switch out for new ones before heading out of the camp entrance with his new mentor for training. Most importantly, she watched Shadekit. He spoke with the older cats and practiced battle moves with the young warriors as if nothing had happened in the morning.

She couldn't forget about how mean he'd been to her, and what he said about special kits and how she could never be one.

*Icestar says I'm one, so he can't say anything to beat that*! she thought.

But even so, she still felt worry that she wasn't adequate enough to be just about *anything*. After all, she'd never seen Shadekit or Berrykit scolded as much as she was scolded. Plus, the warriors didn't look at them as if they were trouble-makers. But she'd seen how they looked at *her*, especially after the mess she'd caused.

*Why am I such a trouble-maker*? she thought with annoyance at herself. *Even I don't know*!

By sunhigh, the sky started to dim as clouds stretched across the sky. She could faintly smell the rain that would soon come. Cats poured in from the entrance, some with fresh-kill and others back from battle-training. A sense of urgency rippled through the Clan, as if something would soon happen. Suddenly alert, Ravenkit stood and watched intently. Her eyes searched around for the gathering cats until she finally spotted her father making his way to the leader's den. A sudden figure blocked her sight from him. She looked up to see Skypelt.

"You've been sitting here for the entire morning," he said, balancing on his three good paws. The fourth paw was wrapped in pieces tree bark and cobwebs.

"Yeah, well, there's not much to do," Ravenkit mumbled, looking down to her paws. "I'm always in trouble. And everyone thinks I'm a nuisance anyway so it doesn't matter where I am, as long as I'm not causing trouble, I guess."

Skypelt's eyes glinted with sympathy. "Don't be like that. I haven't seen a kit as determined as you since Icestar was a kit."

"Was he a trouble-maker like me?" she inquired, pricking her ears even though she already knew the answer.

Skypelt sat down, as if thinking. "Well . . . no. But he was emotional. Uncontrollable sometimes, especially when he was an apprentice. You'd never seen such a rebellious apprentice back in those days. But even though he was so undisciplined at times, always going off on his own, he was the most diligent MoonClan cat I'd ever seen." He paused. "You're a lot like him, Ravenkit."

"I am?" Her eyes lit up.

"You're your father's daughter for sure," he meowed with a purr.

She beamed up at him, her ill mood suddenly revived. But before she could respond, Icestar's voice boomed around the clearing.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Moonrock to hear my words!" he announced, standing up tall upon his den. She'd forgotten that he was climbing up it. He must have been watching the Clan before calling them out.

Skypelt's eyes grew knowingly dim at Icestar's announcement. "You'd better join Dewkit in the nursery."

"Why?" Ravenkit asked, as she watched the warriors and Bloodpaw gather in the clearing.

"This is no meeting for a kit," he murmured.

"Do you know what's going on?" she asked, suddenly curious.

He met her eyes but didn't say anything. She took that as a yes and watched as the crowd assembled into their places. Flameheart and Amberwind sat by Sharpfang and Sagepelt towards the Moonrock, while Rainwhisker, Nightrose and Fireshade made their way toward the fresh-kill pile. Lilyclaw, Squirreltail and Petalwing made their way toward the middle, while Blacksun, Stonetooth, Crowflight and Rosepetal gathered toward the back of the clearing, behind Redsky and Shiningmoon. Silverleaf sat by the medicine den with Sweetheart. Dawnstripe and Volefur, although hard to spot, were sitting by the rogue prisoner with menacing looks in their eyes as they watched him. Bloodpaw's fur was bristling with excitement.

"What's going on?" she whispered to herself. The grim feeling was heavier than before. Petalwing was shifting in her spot with discomfort while others seemed just as excited as Bloodpaw.

"I gather you all together to announce the fate of our rogue prisoner!" Icestar said once everybody had settled down. "As some of you may know, we have drawn to the conclusion that this rogue has every intention to bring harm to our Clanmates, and had even revealed no information of his whereabouts or comrades to us. Not even his name we know!"

Murmuring rose about among the Clan. Ravenkit pricked her ears to listen, but it felt like too many cats were speaking at once.

"Silence!" Sharpfang called. "Listen to what our leader has to say!"

Skypelt pressed to Ravenkit as to prepare her for what Icestar was planning to say. She watched him anxiously, unable to tear her eyes off his powerful figure. Everything about him seemed powerful, from the battle scars that decorated his pelt, to the wisdom in his amber eyes, to even the mere tear on his ear that made him easy to tell apart from the other cats. He stood tall and unaffected despite having all eyes on him. No, she could not even take her own eyes off of him.

"We all know that the rogue has long overdone his stay here in our camp, and we also know that releasing him back into the forest can only lead him back for more trouble," the leader said. "After much consideration, we have finally come to a decision about the fate of this intruder. By the paws of MoonClan, he won't see another shed of daylight again—he will be executed!"

Executed. It is a word Ravenkit had never heard before, but she knew well what it meant.

"You don't have to stay here," Skypelt murmured. She'd almost forgotten he was standing next to her. "You don't have to watch. Go join Dewkit in the nursery, Ravenkit. Please."

Ravenkit caught Shadekit watching the scene unfold from another corner of the camp. If he could watch this, she could too. She puffed out her chest and stood taller, so as to not seem kit-like, before looking up at Skypelt. "I won't go."

With a sigh, Skypelt turned and looked back at Icestar.

"In accordance to the Warrior Code," Icestar continued, "as our enemy is outside the code and poses a threat to our Clan, he will die by my claws. Any MoonClan cat who objects to this decision may speak up. Otherwise, I will carry out with it."

His eyes scanned the clearing briefly. For a moment, their eyes met, and Icestar looked almost sorry that Ravenkit was there. But his eyes passed over her as he continued to look around the clearing. Petalwing shifted in her spot, but she didn't say anything. A few

other cats murmured to each other abruptly before going silent again. Once no cat objectified, Icestar dipped his head to the Clan and leaped off the Moonrock, landing gracefully on his paws. He padded over to where Dawnstripe and Volefur stood guard by the rogue, who was laying on the ground silently.

Ravenkit drew in a deep breath and watched as her father stared over the rogue.

"Do you still wish to remain silent, rogue, or will you at least tell us your name?"

"My name," the rogue said. "My name."

She'd never heard a cat so raspy in her life. His voice was worse than it was before, obvious from the lack of food and water. She felt pity for him, and almost called out to Icestar and objectified to him herself . . . but she knew better than to do that so she remained in her spot and watched anxiously.

"What is your name, rogue?" Icestar pressed, taking a step closer.

The whole Clan watched in silence.

"My name . . . It hasn't been uttered in so long." The rogue paused, and slowly rose to his paws. He seemed weaker than ever. Even Ravenkit could beat him in a fight if she tried. "My name does not deserve to be uttered on the tongue of a murderer . . ." The rogue broke out laughing and gave Icestar a long and steady glance. "Go on, leader. Take my blood. I'm waiting."

"You were on the verge of murdering my own kits," Icestar hissed in response. "If you hadn't been stopped in time, you would have died by MoonClan's paws the day you showed your face in this camp!"

The rogue continued to laugh. "Tasty kits they seemed . . . Quite a pity I couldn't taste their blood!"

Ravenkit's fur bristled and she pressed close to Skypelt. Icestar swung his paw over the rogue's nose without warning, creating a slash mark underneath his left eye. The rogue winced but didn't yell out in pain.

"Is that all you've got?" the rogue demanded as blood trickled down his nose.

"Before I kill you," Icestar hissed, "I'm offering you one last chance. Tell me where you come from and why you are here *now*, or this will be the last breath you will ever take!"

"You know where I come from, Clan-kitty! You will not hear a word from me . . ." The rogue's eyes shone with excitement. "Kill me now! I *dare* you!"

Without another moment to spare, Icestar released his whole strength on the rogue, barreling him to the ground with a growl of rage. From her line of sight, she could see nothing more but the dull eyes of the rogue as he collapsed on the ground—the aftermath of Icestar's killing move. She couldn't tear her eyes off of the rogue as the light left his eyes. His mouth was opened wide as if he was taking his last breath; but there was no trace of fear or remorse in his expression. There was nothing but genuine excitement that seemed to have been his last feeling before death.

**A/N: thank you as usual for the patience :) I want to find more time to write, but junior year of high school is literally so demanding >.< To those who keep on reading, I truly appreciate it! Please let me know if there were any mistakes and as usual I hope you enjoyed the chapter. Lemme know what you think :D**

# Chapter Fifteen

By the time Dewkit finished eating a mouse he'd chosen from the fresh-kill pile, Berrypaw and Shadepaw, the two newest apprentices, trotted into camp carrying even more fresh-kill. Their pelts were sticking up on ends, ruffled from a morning of action probably caused by an exciting chase of prey. Flameheart and Crowflight, their mentors, followed in close behind with prey of their own dangling from their jaws. They must have come back early from their hunting patrol due to the heavy rain clouds rolling in from the distant sky.

Dewkit stood up from his spot and trotted up to the apprentices as both Flameheart and Crowflight dispersed to the warriors' den. Though it's been nearly a moon since they were named as 'paws, it was still hard getting used to the fact that Berrypaw and Shadepaw were not his denmates anymore.

As Berrypaw dropped two mice on the pile, and Shadepaw a squirrel, he cleared his throat from behind.

"Hi, Berrypaw," Dewkit mewed, touching his nose to her tail in greeting. She whirled around, surprised.

"Oh, Dewkit! Hello," she said back. They both looked at Shadepaw, but the gray tom shrugged them off and trotted to the apprentice den, where Bloodpaw could be found grooming himself. "Sorry about him. Grumpy as ever, I suppose."

Dewkit sighed. "At least some things don't change."

"Yeah, right," Berrypaw said sarcastically, pointing with her nose to where Ravenkit was. Though Silverleaf protested this at first, Ravenkit found herself sitting at the top of the leader's den quite often, keeping a watchful eye on the camp. Nobody seemed to mind, as long as she was finally out of everyone's fur. But it still felt strange to Dewkit at how much she's been keeping to herself for the past moon . . . And not to mention, how much the camp atmosphere

changed.

"I guess with you and Shadepaw gone, there's nobody to play with anymore," Dewkit explained, trying to come up with the best possible reason as to why his sister seemed so distant.

Berrypaw looked at him. "Surely she could play with you, right?"

Dewkit shrugged, feeling a bit embarrassed. "She's never liked to play with me. I'm not as strong as she is."

"Well, I guess she's still shocked about what happened with the rogue. But I personally think she should be happy," Berrypaw meowed as she began walking towards the apprentice den. "You know, with newleaf here and all . . . The Clan's not so *hungry* anymore. And it's finally warming up." She paused. "At least *that* should cheer her up."

Dewkit nodded. "It should."

"I'm going to go and join Shadepaw and Bloodpaw for some fresh-kill, though, since the Clan has already eaten," she said with a dip of her head. "See you later, Dewkit."

Dewkit's tail dropped as he watched her turn away after her brother, who was immersed in conversation with Bloodpaw. "See ya'," he murmured, mostly to himself.

*I guess they're not that interested in me anymore*, he thought with disappointment, returning his gaze to Ravenkit up on the Moonrock. With all the changes recently from how busy Icestar and the other warriors have become, to the weird atmosphere in camp, and to the loss of his friendship with Berrypaw, the changes that hurt the most sourced from Ravenkit.

She didn't come up with schemes anymore, didn't cause trouble anymore, and he almost forgot what it was like to be in trouble for following around in her antics. He didn't realize how important her company was to him, now that Berrypaw and Shadepaw were apprentices.

*Not that Shadepaw used to want to hang out around me anyway*, he

thought with a sigh.

A crack of lightning flashed in the distance, and he looked up into the dark clouds of the sky. Although warm season finally arrived, good weather had ceased to bless the forest. The swirling aftermath of the sudden lightning was followed by a jolt of booming thunder and Dewkit jumped at the powerful noise, the fur on his body sticking up with shock and fear.

"You might want to find some shelter," said a voice behind him through the tremors. He whirled around to see Skypelt standing above him, balancing on his three good paws. His eyes relaxed at the sight of the older warrior. "It looks like there's going to be a heavy downfall."

Dewkit's heart was still pounding from the thunder, but he shook it off and gulped. "Wh-what about Ravenkit?"

"Scared of thunder, are you?" Skypelt *mrrowed* with laughter.

Embarrassed, Dewkit shook his pelt and tried to smoothen out his fur. "N-no! It just surprised me!"

"Don't be so flustered, Dewkit, I'm only teasing." Skypelt purred and took a limp forward. "I know that the nursery can be a little boring without your old denmates, so why don't you go help out Sweetheart for the time being? I'll go talk to Ravenkit."

Dewkit inwardly groaned to himself, but nodded. "Sure. Thanks."

He dipped his head with respect to the older tom and stalked over to the medicine den. A few moments later, a drop of cold water splashed right on his spine and he shivered. The rain was about to start!

Before he could get wet, he dashed from his spot and made his way to the medicine den quickly, stopping at the entrance just in time to turn and see the result of the mass of storm clouds. Rain started pouring hard onto the land like a river falling downward, turning the dirt of the camp grounds dark and muddy. He looked over to the Moonrock to see Ravenkit leap off from the top and rush to the

elder's den with Skypelt. Cats who were already in the clearing ran off into nearby dens for shelter, and a few more cats rushed into the camp entrance from patrols, including Icestar, Silverleaf, and Sharpfang, who immediately clambered off into the leader's den.

Dewkit gave a sigh of relief, realizing that he'd been holding in his breath for way too long. Although he'd gotten to a warm and dry place before even getting wet, he still worried that the rest of his Clanmates wouldn't make it in time. After all, nobody likes to get wet!

*Maybe except the StreamClan cats,* thought Dewkit, remembering that they lived by the lake. He couldn't imagine living with his fur always soaked.

"How long will you stand there?" Sweetheart's voice meowed from behind him. He turned around and looked up to see the beautiful medicine cat, who smelled like fresh herbs as usual. Her cream-colored fur seemed neatly groomed.

It reminded him of the time last moon when she came back from the Night Flower, fur all ruffled and un-groomed. Although he didn't like to think about it, he had a feeling that she had a dream that night from StarClan about the dangers in the future that Icestar feared. That was the only time he'd ever seen the beautiful medicine cat so unkept.

"I don't think it's ever rained this much before," Dewkit said in reply at last, turning back to the downpour. Small droplets of water splashed onto his nose and he sneezed, taking a step backward to get further away from the wetness. It's rained before during newleaf, but never this hard. It sounded like all the trees in the forest were falling!

Sweetheart nudged him away from the entrance. "Yes, and the rain is an easy way for a cat to get sick if they don't dry their fur off properly."

"Like, catching whitecough?" he inquired.

"Yes, I'm surprised you even know what that is," she said, nodding

with approval. "It's been a while since we've had a sick cat. You were too young to remember; most cats at the time you were born needed treatment for injuries."

Dewkit nodded with understanding. After all, he'd been born at a terrible time—right in the middle of both leafbare and during the war between MoonClan and DarkClan. Thus, the reason why he never liked causing his parents trouble so often like Ravenkit did was because he understood that they came from a time that was difficult, where cats were weary and battle-driven. Since it was so cold then, he also understood why his parents were so watchful of his needs. And because it was during a battle, they feared for his safety.

He shook his head from the thoughts, trying to get images of blood and battle-scarred warriors out of his mind. "You must have been terribly busy then."

"For sure," Sweetheart said. "Ever since the former medicine cat, Vinetail, passed away, my paws had always been full."

"At least the apprentices collect your herbs for you," Dewkit piped up, trying to lighten the mood. "Now we have three again, so it's not so bad. And when I'm an apprentice, I'll help you out plenty too!"

"I appreciate that," Sweetheart purred. "Now why don't you help me sort out some herbs while you're here?"

Dewkit shrugged and followed the medicine cat to the very back of the den, where herb stores could be made out in the dim light. Strong scents of all kind filled into his nose and he cringed, trying to take it all in while also trying his best not to gag. He almost forgot how hard the rain was pouring outside from the bitter smells! For a few moments, he tried to hold his breath as Sweetheart pulled out a pile of nuts and berries stacked on top of a leaf before he could barely hold it anymore and took in a deep breath.

The inhale of air made him feel worse, though.

*Good StarClan, does she have to live with this?* Dewkit thought with horror, looking up at Sweetheart, who seemed so unaffected by the smells.

"I know it's a bit strong-scented in this particular area, but you'll get used to it, I promise." She pawed at the leaf and slid it in front of Dewkit. "I've got a batch of juniper berries and cob nuts mixed in here. I need help separating them while I tend to some of the fresh leaves."

Dewkit looked down at the pile of herbs on top of the leaf, trying his best to breathe scarcely. "Wh-where do I put them?"

Sweetheart pointed with her nose to small separate holes that were dug into the ground. Dewkit peered into one of them to see a couple of dark blue berries, and then glanced at the next where a sprinkle of cob nuts were.

"Being a medicine cat is all about keeping organized," she explained as she showed him the other herb stores. "That way, it's much easier to care for cats, especially if it's urgent."

Dewkit nodded with understanding and scanned the rest of the store, becoming more and more used to the overwhelming scents all around him.

A bunch of tiny seeds filled the top of one of the holes, while bright red berries filled another. On the other side of the herb storage, there were a few gashes on the wall that reminded Dewkit of the way trees had hollows. Inside the wall-slits were leaves packed on top of each other. One of the leaves let out a strong and pleasant smell that calmed down his stomach. The prickly texture and minty smell must have meant that it was catmint. He remembered a few moons ago how much this herb was needed during the cold weather. He didn't know an herb could smell so good!

He glanced at the other stores to find leaves of all different textures neatly stacked in their own compartments. Long, spindly roots stood leaning against the back wall, with small stems sprouting along the branches, and other stem-like herbs stood adjacent to them, meticulously placed to keep out of the way.

*I didn't know there could be so many herbs*, thought Dewkit. He glanced at the medicine cat to see what she was doing. Quite busily, she snatched up a few leaves that needed to be tended to and started organizing them in neat piles. *I hope she doesn't get mad at me for looking around*.

Dewkit turned back to the rest of the store and tried to see the things he'd overlooked. A couple of leaves were scattered across one particular area quite uncharacteristically. Out of the entire storage, those leaves seemed to be the only things out of place. They looked like regular oak tree leaves, but still smelled a little different. He pawed at it, only to discover that the leaves actually covered another hole in the ground, probably shielding them from either prying eyes or the elements.

*These herbs must be important!* he decided, as an explanation as to why they were covered up so well.

He took a glance inside and made out in the dim light small red berries with darker seeds on the insides. He'd never seen herbs like *these* before. Curiously, he reached down to grab one, before feeling a sharp pain in his tail.

"Yeow!" He jumped with surprise to find his tail in Sweetheart's jaws.

"What are you doing there, Dewkit?" she snapped, letting his tail fall to the ground. "Herbs are not a play-thing, you know!"

"I-I'm sorry!" he quickly said. He didn't like seeing her mad, especially since it was so unlike her. Quickly, he moved out of the way and allowed her to place back the leaves over the hole. When she finished, she turned to him and gave him a very long glance. The sound of pattering rain outside made her seem scarier than she actually was.

"I'm not mad at your curiosity, Dewkit. But you've got to know that dealing with herbs is not a job for a normal cat. Some herbs are not as safe as you think they are," she explained. Her eyes softened by his apologetic stance. "No need to feel bad. But I don't expect you to touch herbs without permission again, alright?"

Slowly, he nodded. "O-okay. I'll just do what you asked of me, then."

He returned to the spot where the juniper berries and cob nuts were in a mixed pile, and picked one of the berries up, dropping it in its correct storage area.

She nodded with approval. "Let me know when you've finished."

* * *

The moon illuminated the forest brilliantly, casting silver lighting and long shadows onto the camp. Dewkit started up at the clear night sky and the stars of silverpelt, the smell of rain still fresh and heavy in the air. He could hear Silverleaf stir in their nest behind him, along with the soft snores of Ravenkit, Smokekit, Silverbreeze, and Goldsun.

*I wonder if they're dreaming*, he thought, but didn't take his eyes off the moon.

The rain lasted for the majority of the day, and when it finally ceased, he was glad to be outside the medicine den and smell the fresh air again. However, he felt more alone than ever. Ravenkit didn't want to play, so he had to find another way to keep himself busy that didn't involve crossing paths with Shadepaw or Bloodpaw. By the end of the day, he ended up lost in thought about everything that has happened so far this past moon.

*I wish being a kit didn't have to be so lonely*, he thought to himself.

Sleepily, he blinked and continued to stare at the night sky until he heard a soft voice from behind him. "Are you not going to sleep?" Dewkit turned around to see Silverleaf staring at him with her soft blue eyes that illuminated against the moonlight. "Come here, try to sleep."

He complied and took his spot beside her, allowing the comfort and warmth of his mother make him drowsy. She drew her tongue over the back of his ear, which made him feel like a little kit again.

"What's troubling you?" she inquired, stopping to look at him

properly. "You can tell me."

Dewkit sighed. "I feel like everything's changing. I feel like Icestar's dream is right—that we'll be destroyed—"

Silverleaf drew her tongue over his ear again and he blinked once more, sleepier than ever. "Whatever happens, Dewkit, we'll never be destroyed. We will always prevail. Remember that, okay? And I will *always* keep you safe."

He took a long yawn and felt his eyes close. "I'll . . . remember."

And with that, the nursery disappeared before him as he drifted off into a deep sleep.

* * *

Dewkit's eyes opened once more in an almost unfamiliar oak forest. He stood up from the ground and dusted off the dirt and leaves that clung to his pelt. A bit surprised, he looked around and tried to recall where he'd seen this place before . . . And his eyes widened when he realized that this was the place his dream occurred a moon ago.

*I'm back here! I'm really back!*

"Welcome, Dewkit," said the familiar voice of a tom. Dewkit made out the shape of a cat up ahead and he held his breath as the white-furred loner approached him, stepping lightly on the ground with his tail flicking behind him. It was as if the tom had appeared from thin air! Dewkit watched with astonishment as the tom stopped in his tracks. "I'm sorry it's been so long."

"It's you again!" Dewkit couldn't suppress the excitement and fear in his voice.

The tom dipped his head to the kit and looked back up, meeting his gaze cooly. "A moon had gone by, Dewkit." Something deep within the loner's dark blue eyes burned a knowingness that made Dewkit squirm with unease. "A moon had gone by, but you have done nothing to improve yourself. I see that you're wasting away your days, all the while knowing something big is going to happen."

Dewkit's fur bristled, and he took a step back with fear. "I-I don'r know how to improve myself. And I don't know what's going to happen!"

*If the forest really is in danger, what am I to do about it anyways*? he thought with despair. *I'm only a kit! I'm not brave like Ravenkit, or strong like Shadepaw!*

He remembered the offer the tom had given him a moon ago: *I can teach you a real hunter's crouch*. He thought about it quite often, wishing that he could dream of this loner once more so that he could suddenly do the things Ravenkit could do. But, he hadn't had a single dream . . . not until now.

"Sitting around all day is not doing anything good for you," the loner blatantly said, his words harsh yet calm. "You do know that, right?"

Dewkit looked up desperately to the older tom. "Will you not help me, then?"

For a moment, the forest stirred. A gush of wind brushed past Dewkit and the loner, sending leaves spiraling into the air above them. Though he was only in a dream, it smelled strongly like the real forest of MoonClan—with scents of pine and oak and fresh grass and rainwater. It smelled like heather, it smelled like mud, and it even smelled like the medicine den. No scent made sense, and yet it all seemed like home.

*I'll lose my home if nothing is done about this*, he thought sadly. *It will all be destroyed.*

"Please," Dewkit murmured, knowing he sounded like a week and feeble kit. "I'm already three moons old, but I'm not strong. I can barely balance on a hunter's crouch, and I can't even pin down my sister in a fight. I'm nothing like Icestar! Everyone looks up to how strong he is, how brave he is, but me . . ." Dewkit paused, his paws trembling. "I'm just the one everyone knows as Dewstar's kin!"

He felt bad for saying it, but it was true. He knew the looks that some cats gave him. He knew that they said about him. Silverleaf

had told him that Dewstar wasn't what everyone thought he was, but Dewstar's actions said otherwise. And Dewkit hated sharing his name with a cat so evil. The fact that he was so bad at everything didn't help, either!

"I can help you," the loner murmured at last, staring up at the leaves, "to an extent. But you'll have to do something for me, too."

"What is it?" Dewkit asked quickly, his heart pounding in his chest. He almost felt agony at the thought of losing his Clan and his home. He would do *anything* to change the way cats looked at him, anything to save them!

The loner stooped down to Dewkit's level and eyed him hard. "I know that you must feel unbelievably sad and out of place, Dewkit. But you've yet to discover who you really are, and what the future will be like for you." The loner paused, his eyes stern. "You must make sure that you and Ravenkit don't stray on the path of darkness. You mustn't lose yourself to it. Becoming strong is not a matter of winning a battle, but a matter of mind and heart. In the end, that is all that will matter."

Dewkit stood still for a moment, before piping up again. "But . . . but losing a battle would only mean—"

"It would mean nothing, Dewkit. Battles aren't everything. Helping your Clanmates is. Having a good heart is. Got it?"

He stood there with disbelief. "I thought you would help me become stronger," he whispered. "I thought that you would help me save MoonClan!"

"I *am* helping you," the loner snapped. "You just need to take my words into consideration. Only then will I help you."

"That's not fair!" Dewkit shouted.

The loner dipped his head. "Goodbye, Dewkit. When you start seeing things my way . . . *then* we'll talk."

"Wait, no!" the kit meowed, rushing up to the rogue. He prepared himself to fully batter into the loner, but felt himself slipping right

through a cluster of cold air. He tumbled onto the ground and landed with his front paws splayed out in front of him, before quickly scrambling up to his paws to see the loner standing in the spot where he'd just tackled through. Only except, the loner's body was not fully there. He was fading!

"Don't leave!" Dewkit pleaded. "Please don't leave!"

But the loner had vanished without a trace, just as he appeared. His heart sank as he was left there alone, thoughts and worries flooding his mind like a wildfire.

Getting better for the sake of his Clan was going to be a lot harder than he thought . . .

# Chapter Sixteen

**A/N: I just wanted to inform you guys that I did another extreme power-edit on Icetail's Enemy, and ended up changing the name Dropeyes to Shiningmoon! You might've noticed but, I kinda really suck at names, and nobody liked "Dropeyes" so I decided to make it nicer. I mean, I hope it's nicer! "Shiningmoon" does have a better ring to it, does it not? And plus, since her name was originally "Moon" before it was changed in respects to the Clan, I thought it was best to add a little tribute to that in the suffix of her name. Well, anyhow, she is no longer Dropeyes. I hope you guys like the decision :)**

Rays of light beamed at the entrance of the leader's den. Jagged uneven rocks looked silver against the beam of gold, offering the protected space little light even though it was morning. Icestar inhaled the cool, muddy air and then exhaled slowly, his mind racing as fast as a rabbit.

*Was it right of me to do that?* he thought, staring at his paw.

As he sheathed and unsheathed his claws, light gleamed off the tips of the deadly sharpness that stole the life of that prisoner-rogue one moon ago. The rogue's eyes still haunted him, gleaming hungrily.

*I've killed cats before, once even breaking the law of StarClan.* He remembered of the time he was an apprentice and took revenge for his mother, murdering the vicious Fallentail. But this time, it felt different! He couldn't get the image out of his head, and he couldn't stop contemplating what he'd done.

The flicker of the rogue's yellow eyes showered contempt—and what Icestar thought to be excitement—before the killing blow.

"Fox-dung!" Icestar muttered. What if he caused another war? He hadn't seen the other rogues since CloudClan chased them away, but he knew that they would be back. And if they found out he had killed their comrade, things could end badly.

*Oh StarClan, what if I messed up terribly?*

He sighed and looked up, almost jumping with surprise to see familiar dark blue eyes staring at him from the entrance of the leader's den. Sharpfang stood watching, his gaze cool but knowing. His shadow merged in with the darkness of Icestar's den, blocking the sun's light from entering. The deputy observed him for a moment before padding inside, his pawsteps silent on the ground.

"It's been one moon since the execution. How long are you going to regret it?" he asked, flicking his tail. "I could have done it for you, you know." He was always sharp, catching on the leader's thoughts as if they were that easy to read.

Guiltily, Icestar's paws shuffled and he tried not to avert his gaze. "I don't know." He sighed again and stood up, feeling restless now, and shook the moss and feathers from his pelt. "I could never make you do something like that, Sharpfang. Sometimes, I just feel like it wasn't the right thing to do. I took a life, and for what cost? MoonClan could be in *danger* because of me."

He gulped, his heart beating a little quicker than usual. Below the fear he had for MoonClan's future, he also felt guilt somewhere deep below his fur, under his skin and bones, boiling with his blood. Ravenkit was watching that day—it was the first time she'd seen death, and by Icestar's own claws. She hadn't been herself since then.

*No kit is supposed to see a cat die.*

Sharpfang cleared his throat, and Icestar realized that he'd drifted off again. "MoonClan will stand by any decision our leader makes."

The deputy was good at remaining stoic, and Icestar didn't know whether or not Sharpfang was saying that to make him feel better or because he actually meant it. *After all, leader's word is law.*

"Even the wrong ones?" Icestar murmured.

Sharpfang nodded. "As deputy, I'll let you know if I think you're wrong. And the Clan isn't necessarily under-spoken, either. We all

stand by you no matter what, though, because we know you have MoonClan's best interests at heart."

"Thank you, Sharpfang, but . . . my judgements are not always the best," he pointed out sadly. "And you know that."

"This is a flaw every cat must deal with," Sharpfang said without hesitation. "It's not just you, Icestar. Don't beat yourself up for something that didn't even happen yet." His eyes gleamed with harshness and determination, making the leader feel a bit more self-assured. "And besides, Brightstar chose you to succeed her because she *knew* that your decisions are always made based on the interests of others. You did what you thought was *right*."

The whistle of a sparrow drifted into the den, followed by light chattering from his Clanmates as they left for patrols.

"We all think what you did was right," Sharpfang added, taking a step back. "But it's not right to sulk around all morning when your Clanmates are out hunting."

Icestar dipped his head. "You're right, Sharpfang. I'm sorry."

Unable to express his gratitude other than with a small purr, he brushed past his deputy and padded outside the den.

*I shouldn't think about it,* he realized, shaking the image of the rogue's eyes from his mind. The guilt would only slow him down, render him useless to his Clan. Even though he tried hard, however, he knew the image would still haunt him.

As soon as Icestar's paws stepped on the soft ground beyond the den entrance, he took a deep breath and felt a bit calmer. Sharpfang followed Icestar's heels and turned up next to the leader, lifting his eyes up to the bright day as well.

"See what you've been missing?" Sharpfang pointed out.

The rising sun beamed into Icestar's eyes and he squinted against it. The air tasted like fresh dew from a night of rain, heavy in the air like the pollen from blooming flowers. Birds in the trees above him whistled, flapping their wings from branch to branch—the perfect

sound of the morning. As his eyes adjusted to the brightness, the forest seemed much greener than it did a few days ago, with pink buds blooming all around the clearing as a sign that leafbare had finally gone. Even the trees had small buds sprouting from their dark branches, a sign of wonderful weather and new prey.

*How can I be so sulky on a day like this?* he thought, feeling guilty for sitting around all morning. He looked around the clearing to find that most warriors have gone out on patrol. Skypelt, who seemed to be getting better by the day, was playing moss-ball with Dewkit by the medicine den, while Silverleaf and Goldsun shared a vole by the nursery. The elders all sunbathed in the clearing, their voices immersed in conversation.

"Icestar!" some kit mewed. "Icestar, Icestar!"

He looked down to see Smokekit clambering toward him. The kit's fur was turning redder by the day, resembling his late father Ashtail more and more. Only recently had the kit began to eat prey, so he was still quite small, but the volume of his fur made him look twice his size. Strands of it stuck up at all angles, especially on his bushy tail.

It felt like only yesterday his own kits were mewling and tumbling after him, too.

"Good morning, young warrior," Sharpfang said curtly, nodding to Smokekit with a sense of importance. The kit jumped with excitement and replicated the deputy's movements.

"G'morning!" Smokekit squeaked back.

Icestar looked up to see Swiftbreeze watching from the nursery entrance, her eyes calm but glazed over. Her fur was groomed nicely, as if she'd spent her morning sharing tongues. He looked back down to Smokekit and mustered out a purr.

*I mustn't dwell on past things*, he reminded himself again. *It only pushes me away from helping MoonClan.*

"You've grown since I last saw you, Smokekit," the leader

complimented. Smokekit's eyes gleamed with excitement. "Are you playing all by yourself?"

He nodded. "Suppose so!"

"Why don't you ask Ravenkit to play? Maybe she can even teach you some new games," Icestar suggested, turning around to find his daughter up on the Moonrock like usual. Her black fur seemed lighter underneath the sun's rays. Her eyes were closed, and her paws were spread out luxuriously as she sunbathed.

He suppressed the guilt that wanted to creep up from her seclusion from the rest of the Clan.

Smokekit bounded from his spot eagerly and pawed the base of the Moonrock, before calling out, "Ravenkit! Icestar said you're gonna play with me!"

Icestar watched as Ravenkit lifted her head, looking down from her spot. "Oh, is that so?" she muttered sleepily. Her tone seemed rather uninterested.

With a sigh, Icestar padded up behind Smokekit and stopped at the base as well. "Yes, Ravenkit, come down and play. You can't spend the rest of your days up on that rock!"

"Yes I can!" she instantly snapped back, turning around stubbornly.

Icestar winced at her harshness but didn't rebuke her. Usually he would have instantly disciplined her rudeness, but he didn't want to upset her, and make her feel like she had to distance herself even more . . .

"Looks like we've got a rebellious one," Sharpfang said, cutting off Icestar's thoughts. "Aren't you going to say something?"

The leader instantly realized that he was thinking about the execution again, letting the guilt creep back up like a stealthy snake. *I can't think like that!* he reminded himself once more, but he also couldn't bring himself to say anything back to Ravenkit.

After all, what would he even say?

"Let her be for now," Icestar decided at last. "Sorry, Smokekit. Why don't you play with Dewkit and Skypelt instead?"

"Suppose so," the kit said, his voice slightly disappointed.

As Smokekit ran off to join them, Icestar turned around and glanced back up at Ravenkit, feeling a small pang in his heart. He wished he knew how to comfort his own daughter, but he felt at a loss on what to do.

Sharpfang turned to Icestar. "I'll be going out on a hunting patrol. I didn't send a border patrol to StreamClan yet. If you'd like to lead a patrol there, it's all yours."

Icestar dipped his head. "Thank you, Sharpfang. For everything."

Sharpfang cuffed Icestar's ear affectionately and said, "No need to thank me," before heading off to find a few cats in the warriors den who had not been sent out.

He watched as his deputy left the camp, followed by Rainwhisker and Lilyclaw. His sister walked especially close to Rainwhisker, both warriors looking happy and content as they ducked underneath the camp entrance.

*They don't seem bothered,* he realized as they disappeared. *In fact, nobody does! Maybe Sharpfang is right---maybe I'm just worrying myself for nothing.*

Silverleaf padded up to Icestar when she realized that the deputy had left, and touched noses with him in greeting. He instantly felt warm and comforted by her pleasant aura, glad that she had come to meet with him.

"How did you sleep, Icestar?" she asked, tilting her head.

Icestar drew his tongue over her ear affectionately, smoothening down a patch of fur that stuck up. "Like usual. There were no dreams tonight."

"But?" she asked expectantly.

He pulled apart from her. "What do you mean, 'but?'"

She rolled her eyes. "I know when you're troubled, silly. Don't you think we've been through enough for us to know how the other is feeling?" Icestar ducked his head with embarrassment, feeling like a kit that was being scolded by his mother all over again. "So tell me, what's on your mind, Icestar?"

This time, it was her to draw her tongue over his fur, grooming it flat against his body.

He didn't want to talk, or even think about the rogue, so he sighed and spoke about his other ailment. "Well, it's Ravenkit. I'm sure you noticed how strange she's been this past moon."

Silverleaf nodded sadly. "She hasn't played much at all. And not to mention, all she does is pick fights with Shadepaw and Bloodpaw."

"That's the issue," Icestar murmured. "I think it's with what happened . . . one moon ago. She saw me doing something she shouldn't have ever seen. It's my fault she's like this. She's angry at everyone, especially at *me*."

He glanced back at the Moonrock to see his daughter still dozing off, her tail flicking off the edge. Below in camp, Dewkit, Skypelt and Smokekit all still seemed to be enjoying their game of moss-ball. If Ravenkit were fine, not only would she be playing with them, but also taking charge and putting her own rules in the game.

*She always liked to do things her way*, he thought. *She never listens to anyone!* And so, it hurt to see her endlessly sulk, especially when it could be his fault.

"She won't be like that forever," Silverleaf said, taking her eyes off Icestar and looking over at Ravenkit as well. "She's three moons old, almost four. In enough time, she'll be an apprentice."

"But will she be like this *until* she's an apprentice?" he asked, slightly concerned.

His silver-furred mate shook her head with confidence. "I'm sure she won't. She hasn't changed, she's just thinking more than she used to.

Maybe you should talk to her?"

"Oh, I already tried."

"And?"

Icestar tried to suppress his disappointment. "She snapped at me. Like usual."

"You should try again," Silverleaf said, now catching his gaze. Her blue eyes shone with the same worry he had, but she seemed more knowing and confident than he. After all, a mother knows her kits best. Who was Icestar to doubt her?

"What should I say, then?" he wondered. It wasn't like she approached him much at all for the past moon, so her interests at the moment seemed completely void. He had no idea what had been going through her mind!

Silverleaf thought for a moment. "Don't talk about what's bothering her. But make sure she knows that she has nothing to be upset about . . . Alright?"

"Alright . . . it wouldn't hurt to try," he said. "Wish me luck."

He pulled apart from Silverleaf and clambered back to the Moonrock, thinking of things to say. Never in his life had he been so dumbfounded, but he supposed that this is what it's like to have kits. After all, no other kits in the past had treated him with such disrespect before! No other kits seemed to be as big of trouble-makers as his own, either.

As he reached the base of the Moonrock, he paused. What if Ravenkit didn't want to hear what he had to say?

*Nonsense! Why am I being so afraid of my own kit*? Icestar thought. He gathered his haunches and leaped up the den, grabbing hold of a crevice to help pull himself all the way up on the top. As he reached the flat surface, Ravenkit looked up quickly and heaved a deep sigh when she spotted her father, and plopped back down with little interest.

*Oh no, she won't ignore me*! he decided. *But I guess I shouldn't come off as hostile, either*.

"I noticed how much you like to spend your days up here lately," Icestar decided to say, watching to see if Ravenkit would get up. He noticed that her ear was angled toward him, but she didn't move or even acknowledge his words. *At least she's listening*. "It's a good place to watch the Clan. Brightstar, the leader before me, used to spend almost every single morning up here too."

She didn't stir. A gentle breeze rattled the trees, and soft pale light filtered through the canopy of leaves as the sun rose higher and higher into the sky. Icestar took a deep breath of the fresh air.

"You're a lot like her, you know," he murmured at last.

Ravenkit turned slowly to look at him. "Me, like *Brightstar*?"

He met her eyes, feeling sudden triumph that he caught her attention. "Yes, much like Brightstar."

"You're just saying that," she snorted.

He shook his head. "Of course I'm not. It's the truth! Brightstar had just as big of an attitude as you do, Ravenkit. And even though she was quite old, she always had youthful ideas on her mind that kept the Clan safe and busy."

Ravenkit's amber eyes glowered underneath the sunlight. "Like my schemes? The ones everyone hates?"

All the negative emotions Icestar felt before washed away as he remembered the leader and mentor he became so fond of. "Your mind bears quite the resemblance to Brightstar's," he said, turning his eyes up at the forest as memories of her flooded into his mind. "She didn't scheme like you, but she was a great tactician. Battles were always fought carefully, and her words at the gathering were well-formulated so that no matter what, the other Clans would know how strong MoonClan is, even at our weakest moments. She wanted cats to learn every way of survival, utilize every ability we could hone. No cat ever thought quite like her; well, except you,

Ravenkit."

Ravenkit burst up from her spot, her eyes round and her demeanor kit-like once more. "But I don't understand! Whenever I scheme, it's hurts everyone, but Brightstar's schemes always helped the Clan!"

Icestar purred. "The thing is, you're still a kit. Of course you're going to do wrong, since you're still learning. But by the time you're an apprentice, you'll learn to be wise and use your mind for the best. Don't you think?"

"I mean, I suppose . . ." the black-furred kit mumbled.

"And don't you think sulking away your days is doing no good for you?" he inquired.

*Even though that's what I was doing earlier*, he thought, realizing how alike he and his daughter really were. Ravenkit seemed embarrassed, her ears flattened back at the mention of her sulking.

Icestar continued his speech, confident that his daughter's full attention was on him. "While Dewkit and Smokekit learn useful battle tactics and important information from the warriors and elders, you're sitting here sleeping each day. Don't you think it's time to change that? After all, your ceremony is only a little over two moons away. The sooner you prepare for it, the better warrior you will be."

She seemed to be in deep thought for a few moments, before her amber eyes lit up and she burst up onto her paws.

"You're right Icestar," Ravenkit said at last, leaning up to nuzzle him. "I'm going to make sure Dewkit still can't pin me down!"

With that, the kit leaped off the Moonrock and stumbled after her brother. He watched his kits with affection as Ravenkit unsuspectingly pounced on top of Dewkit from behind just as he was about to catch a mossball, pinning him to the ground with his face flat on the dirt.

Icestar *mrrowed* to himself with amusement, his spirits now lifted more than they were before. If Ravenkit could feel so self-assured,

so could he. Silverleaf flashed him a nod of approval from the other side of the clearing.

As he leaped off the Moonrock with a new resolve to start his daily duties, Stonetooth and a few other warriors trotted in from the camp entrance with prey in their jaws. Stonetooth dropped a mouse onto the fresh-kill pile before trotting up to Icestar, his eyes alert.

"Icestar!" he called. "I've got urgent news."

"What is it?" Icestar asked, raising his ears with alarm. His moment of triumph seemed to wash away and worry filled into his mind all over again.

Stonetooth looked back to his patrol, and Shiningmoon, Flameheart and Hawktalon all exchanged worried looks amongst themselves. Finally, Sharptooth began to speak. "Well, I thought I imagined it, but . . . for a moment, we caught fresh rogue scent by StreamClan borders. It might have been the wind carrying the scent, but . . . I think they're back."

"*What*?" Icestar gasped with disbelief.

Shiningmoon padded forward, her ears flattened and eyes round with worry. "The rogues, Icestar. They could be back!"

# Chapter Seventeen

**A/N: Hey there, here is another painfully slow update. This time it took another year to publish the next chapter. So sorry, my readers! :( I am still hoping to finish this book. These random bouts of creativity come from sudden gains of time, so I'm sure you understand. One day, this book may finally be complete! At any rate, I hope you enjoy this chapter. Also, stay safe and healthy indoors in the midst of this COVID19 mess <3.**

Golden light filtered through the trees, casting wispy shadows over the forest floor. The air felt warm and pleasant, with a faint smell of heather and water that carried in the soft breeze. The only sounds that could be heard were the snapping twigs and the lapping lake that came from upwind, along with the occasional chirping of birds in the trees above.

As Icestar's patrol traveled closer to the border, he could see StreamClan territory ahead. The large willow tree that stood center in their island-camp gleamed against the sun, with long leaves flowing gently with the breeze against its wiry trunk. The tree's image reflected off the glistening water below. Hw spotted a few warriors swimming back and forth from the mainland to the island, probably apprentices learning how to swim.

He stopped walking once he reached the scent-markers, and turned around to face Dawnstripe and Volefur.

"This shouldn't take long," he said. "And remember, if you catch any rogue-scent, let me know."

Volefur snorted. "Those bullies should be long gone by now." He padded over to the edge of the border and began marking a tree.

*I hope so*, Icestar thought, remembering Stonetooth's urgency earlier that day. *But the chances are, they must have found their way back to the territories.*

"I'll keep my senses open," Dawnstripe said, rolling her eyes at her brother.

Icestar nodded gratefully as she dispersed to a different part of their section. He found his own spot and started to strengthen the scent of MoonClan as well, reassured that if the rogues chose to cross into their territory again, they would be doing so knowing well that they've trespassed.

*If that's not a warning, I'm not sure what is*, he thought, remembering how casually they crossed into other Clans. They shouldn't expect to be told nicely if they entered some other cat's territory! He'd make them regret *ever* coming near the Clan again.

Feeling more reassured now, Icestar traveled and marked up the border, picking up faint smells that he knew were only a few days old. Because of the endless rain they have gotten for the past quarter-moon, the smells had washed away almost entirely. Though his sense of smell wasn't that keen, he could still catch the mouthwatering voles that must have had a hollow nearby, as well as the smell of a rabbit.

*I almost forgot what those taste like!* he thought, remembering how scarce prey had been over the harsh and snowy leafbare. He hadn't tasted the rabbit Amberwind caught during her warrior assessment, but had looked forward to catching one of his own with the warmth of the seasonal change.

*No, I can't hunt now. I must focus on keeping the Clan safe!*

He continued to mark and scent, paying attention to every place a cat could possibly hide. He poked his head into a tree hollow and caught nothing but a very faint fox-scent. It must have lived there during leaf-bare but seemed to be long gone. There was no trace of a cat, however. He pulled out from the hollow and continued down the border, smelling the roots of bushes, old prey burrows in the ground, and even the undergrowth surrounding various plants and

trees in MoonClan territory.

There was nothing.

He sighed as he continued to make his way down the border. By the time the sun had seemed to sink a bit past sunhigh, he finished his section of the border and wondered if the other two were finished as well. He padded downstream to the direction they had gone and suddenly heard faint hissing coming from up ahead past a holly bush. His ears perked up, but the hissing did not stop.

*Is it the rogues?* he suddenly realized, heartbeat quickening. The rogues liked to travel in a gang, and there were only two cats out on a patrol with Icestar. What if one of his Clanmates got surrounded?

Without wasting another breath, he dashed from his spot, brushing past the holly bush and downhill toward where the hissing sounds came from. As he ran closer, he made out two cats the size of apprentices standing face-to-face on each side of the border—an apprentice he didn't recognize from StreamClan, and MoonClan's own Shadepaw!

A bit relieved to find no rogues, Icestar slowed down to a trot and approached them with concern and a bit of curiosity. After all, why was there so much growling and hissing?

"—you crossed onto our section of the territory first!" snarled the she-cat apprentice from StreamClan. "I could have you captured for that!"

"Not true at all!" Shadepaw rebuked, his fur bristling. "You dirty fish-eaters just want to catch and eat all our forest prey! I saw you stalking a mouse on MoonClan territory—"

The she-cat hissed with rage. "*You* were the one who wandered too far close to the river!"

"The *water* doesn't belong to you," Shadepaw spat back. "Neither does MoonClan's *prey*!"

"You lying fox-heart!"

Icestar heard enough. The argument seemed to have escalated to bickering that reminded him of the way he and Dewstar acted as kits. With a big huff, he held his head up high with authority and padded into the two apprentices' line of sight. As a stick cracked underpaw, their heads snapped up and their eyes widened. They stared at Icestar with surprise as he finally reached them.

"Shadepaw, what is the meaning of this?" Icestar asked, his tail twitching. "Aren't you supposed to be on a patrol?"

Shadepaw looked to the side with embarrassment. "Yeah, well, I kind of got separated from them."

"Because he wanted to come here and cross into StreamClan!" the she-cat apprentice exclaimed. She looked to be no older than six moons old, fresh from the nursery den. Her pretty tortoiseshell coat was groomed back nicely, the ends behind her ears and on the base of her tail sticking up with threat and agitation.

*She has no business trying to pick a fight!* Icestar thought, but knew that his words couldn't resort to kit-like mockery.

"I'm sure Shadepaw didn't cross the border," he said calmly. "And likewise, I'm sure *you* didn't either. There is just a misunderstanding here."

Shadepaw looked up with alarm. "But—"

"What is going on here?" a new voice meowed from behind the StreamClan apprentice. Icestar glanced behind her and made out a familiar warrior approaching. He inwardly groaned to himself when he spotted Troutstream, who always seemed to dislike conversing with the other Clans, trotting up to the scene.

Troutstream reached the border, standing behind the apprentice with his fur dripping wet. "Of course it's *you* causing trouble, Maplepaw." The apprentice sucked her head with embarrassment as Troutstream looked up arrogantly. "Why are you talking to these troublemakers?"

"I was just clearing up a misunderstanding here," Icestar said, trying

to keep his tone as neutral as possible despite his agitation.

"Yeah right," Troutstream retorted. "Listen, you'd better take your apprentice and go before there's trouble."

The fur on Icestar's haunches prickled up. What blatant disrespect! Have cats completely forgotten what it was like to have allyship beyond the borders within your own Clan? It was as if certain cats were still stuck on the hostility of DarkClan---trust issues with the other Clans could not fade that easily.

He took a deep breath and tried to contain his anger. "We are not here to cause trouble, Troutstream. This is just a mere quarrel."

"We can keep it at that too if you back off," added a retort from behind him. It was Shadowheart, Shadepaw's mentor. "Come here, Shadepaw."

Reluctant to be the first to back off, Shadepaw fell back to his mentor's side, his unbreaking hostile gaze still on Maplepaw. Icestar's tail lashed as he watched the StreamClan warriors take a few steps back into their own territory as a response.

Troutstream nosed Maplepaw back to the direction of their camp. With one final look behind him, he hissed, "If we see MoonClan cats close to the borders again, trust that we will have issues."

Icestar silently watched as they entered the river and began to swim away. Their fur soaked up with cool water, tails following behind as they paddled to the other side of the river. With his eyes upon their vast river, he suddenly knew why the StreamClan cats were so on edge. In the far distance, he spotted the tall silhouettes of Twolegs along their river, albeit far from their actual camp. In all his life, this may be the third or fourth time he had actually seen the strange creatures.

*If they're in StreamClan, there's no denying that they will eventually find their way in MoonClan, he thought with unease.*

He looked over to Shadowheart, who dipped his head and led Shadepaw away. Their dark pelts merged in with the shadows of

the trees as they went on to continue their hunt. With a deep breath, Icestar went off on his own direction to finish marking his territory and hunt for the band of rogues.

* * *

By the time Icestar, Dawnstripe, and Volefur finished their patrol, they found rogue scents but it was not particularly fresh. If anything, the rogues had left soon after Shiningmoon and Stonetooth had discovered their scent. The warriors could do nothing but leave their borders reinforced, hoping that the rogues would not enter the territory again. And if they did, they were sure that they would catch them this time.

Icestar let the two siblings go on ahead to camp so he could find the rabbit he had scented earlier. He stayed silent to his Clanmates about the border skirmish and about the Twoleg sighting, but he could not contain his urge to hunt the rabbit in his territory. The sweet taste of rabbit blood felt like the only thing that could lift his spirits.

He caught wind of its scent, closed his eyes, and crept through the undergrowth in pursuit. The smell circled his nose and flowed deep into his throat, exciting his impulse to hunt. Pushing past tall ferns and grass blades with his nose, he found that he was closing in on it until he could finally hear the prey munching on nuts and plants. He opened his eyes and saw the small brown rabbit, plump now with newleaf, rounded over a small pile of its own food.

Excitement rippled through Icestar as if he were an apprentice all over again, and he leaped from the undergrowth.

The rabbit wasted no time and immediately dashed, leaving Icestar to land on its previous spot. Without missing a heartbeat, Icestar pushed off the ground again and ran after it with all his force, gaining on the fast creature steadily. He whizzed by branches, dodging the thick undergrowth of the forest floor that did so well to protect both prey and predator. The rabbit scrambled under a bush and he leaped over it, landing heavily on his paws once on the other side. He spotted the brown creature scrambling around the trunk of a tree and he followed close after it, cutting to the other

side of the tree in an attempt to cut it off. With outstretched claws, he reached for it and grabbed the creature's shoulders, pinning it to the ground despite its struggles. Without another second to waste, he delivered the killing bite, his teeth sinking into its soft and warm flesh, tasting the blood already.

Icestar let go of the rabbit, panting.

A twig snapped behind him. His fur spiked up once he realized that the step was too quiet to have been a Clanmate. He whipped his head around and was met by the dark eyes of Rowan, the leader of the band of rogues that he had been encountering for the past two moons. Two more appeared right behind him: a smaller golden she-cat who he recognized from the fight he had a moon ago, and Jinx, the tabby who had taunted Amberwind during her warrior assessment.

*They didn't leave!* Icestar thought with horror. *If they can hide so well in our territory . . . who's to say there are not more right now?*

Absolute fear entered into his chest once he realized that there may be more lurking around. Worse, they may know where the camp is.

"Well, well, look who we have here," Rowan said, completely emerging from the darkness. He stretched as if he had been still for the whole morning, waiting for this particular moment.

Icestar growled. "What are you doing on my territory?"

The rogue licked his paw and drew it over his ear casually. "You *know* what we're doing here. We've discussed it before, haven't we?"

"MoonClan doesn't have what you want." He looked down for a second, hoping deep within his heart that his other Clanmates were okay. He could handle the rogues, but he couldn't bear to think about what would happen to another if they were in his situation.

*They could get hurt, or killed!*

"You seem to have a hard time understanding now, Clan leader," laughed Rowan. "*We* have the higher ground."

"And we know what you did to one of ours," added Jinx with malice laced in his voice.

Rowan must have been talking about the rogue that was imprisoned in the MoonClan camp for a time. The rogue that Icestar ultimately executed. Even though the elders did well to bury and hide the rogue's scent as an extra precaution, somehow these rogues knew about him.

Icestar backed up, and the rogues stepped forward.

Rowan's eyes were sinister. "What's wrong, Icestar? Too scared now that you don't have your warriors to fight for you? Don't worry, we'll go easy on you."

Alarm ran through his body. *How does he know my name? Just how much do these cats know about us?*

"Mouse caught your tongue?" Jinx taunted. "Speak!"

Finally, Icestar snapped out of his thoughts. "What . . . what do want from me?"

Rowan hissed with annoyance. "You know exactly what we want, Icestar. The cat who destroys. He will destroy us all if we don't stop him in time! He is already destroying this forest, and he will destroy *our* forest next."

"That-that's not true," the leader protested. "There's no destruction to be had. And those Twolegs---"

"Enough! Turns out what you have to say is not that important after all." Rowan stepped closer again, his claws unsheathing. "You took the life of one of our cats though, so I must kill you for it!"

Icestar bared his fangs, stood his ground, his head dipping and his body preparing in a battle stance. *I should have been more careful!*

After all, they had completely misunderstood. And how did they even catch wind of the old prophecy anyway, especially after it had been long fulfilled? The rogues became more and more mysterious and dangerous to him the more he ran into them.

For a second, there was a moment of silence. Then as if cueing them, Jinx and the younger she-cat pounced on top of Icestar, pinning him down with their combined weight.

Icestar's back slammed against the forest ground, dust spiraling up into the air from the impact. He gritted his teeth and pushed the she-cat off with his hind paws with all his force, sending her flying off of him. Jinx's claws tore for Icestar's neck, but he used his forepaws to grab around the neck of the rogue on top of him and bring his face down to his own level. With his teeth, Icestar reached forward and bit into Jinx's shoulder. The rogue yowled out in pain, but Icestar's forepaws had him locked in close, unable to escape. Suddenly, the rogue was torn off of him by none other than his own companion, Rowan. Icestar used this opportunity to scramble to his paws, panting.

"Not bad, Clan-cat," Rowan growled. "But you're the one who is outnumbered this time!"

With that, he leaped toward Icestar but the MoonClan leader ducked, scrambling out of the way. Whirling around, Icestar took Rowan's temporary stun to his advantage and pinned the rogue down from behind, his claws digging into the tom's shoulder blades. Rowan's piercing yowl called for the young she-cat to chomp onto Icestar's tail. Sharp and uncomfortable pain coursed into his tail and he promptly let go of the rogue, tackling the she-cat off of him.

Icestar always felt bad for overpowering young, apprentice-like cats, but in this situation, he needed as many of them unable to fight as possible. Three to one was tough!

He bit down onto the young she-cat's ear and scratched her belly with his hind claws, causing her to cry out in utter pain before being torn off of her by Jinx, who was much stronger than his slim self appeared. The tabby tom dug his claws into Icestar's spine, causing him to gasp and roll over, tearing fiercely at the rogue with outstretched claws.

A few of his blows hit Jinx's cheek, and then Icestar suddenly realized that Jinx wasn't fighting back---no, he was holding him down! He felt the weight of the she-cat on his hindlegs, and with

enough struggling, Jinx managed to pin Icestar's forelegs back uncomfortably to the sides of his head. He struggled with all his might, scratching and reaching for the two with his claws and teeth with as much strength as he could muster.

It was no use, they had him pinned down.

Rowan's eyes glowed above Icestar, and he stopped struggling to take a good look at the rogue leader who stood over him with victory.

"Pinning you down really is no easy feat, Icestar. But eventually, anything is possible." He laughed. "A true warrior you are. But not true enough!"

Icestar hissed, managing to dig one of his claws into Jinx's legs.

"Yeow!" Jinx growled. "Hurry, finish him!"

Icestar barred his teeth. "You may have pinned me down now, but it won't be so easy to finish me."

*If they kill me now, I still have more lives to spare*, he thought desperately.

"How can you be so sure of such a thing?" demanded Rowan, pacing over Icestar as if teasing his death. "Look at the situation you are in now. You should have no confidence in seeing another day."

The MoonClan leader spat at him.

Rowan yelped in sudden disgust, wiping his face off swiftly. "Oh, now you've done it, Clan-kitty. After I kill you, I'm going for your kits!"

Icestar's struggles intensified. "You mangy piece of fox-dung! Don't you dare hurt them!"

"Say your last goodbye's," the rogue snarled. With his paws raised high into the air, he stretched out his claws to their full length, and drove down on Icestar's neck at full force.

Fire. That was all Icestar could feel in his whole body from that one spot. His neck burned like fire, felt uncomfortably wet, and for a heartbeat, he didn't realize that the fire was pain. His head rolled back and he stopped struggling, his eyes up past the canopy of leaves above him and into the light blue sky. When Rowan slashed at Icestar's throat again, the leaves and the sky and the feeling altogether left him and he found himself ascending past the rogues, past the canopy of leaves and past the light blue sky, straight into Silverpelt.

* * *

"You know why you're here, right?"

Icestar found himself in a field of grass of silver that seemed to blend into the milky, starless sky. The air tasted sweet, abundant with the smell of heather from the moor, water from the river, prey-creatures from the trees, and mud from the marshes. The dirt and grass below him felt as soft as a moss bed, and every urge in his body said to lay down and sleep in it, out in the open, because he knew he was in a safe place. But he could not sleep now, no matter how much he wanted to.

"Yes, Brightstar," Icestar whispered under his breath.

He turned his gaze up to the eight cats before him, looking at all the faces of each cat. Shard was, of course, not there. Such a traitor would not dare turn up in StarClan again, even though he was the giver of one of Icestar's lives. Each cat there, though, brought comfort to him and almost made him forget about the burning pain in his neck and the familiar tight feeling in his chest.

Brightstar, Sparrowheart, Featherbreeze, Grasspelt, Vinetail, Ripplefur, Whiteeye, and Darkstar all stood before him in.

"You no longer have eight lives, Icestar, but I'm sure you know." Brightstar dipped his head to him. "You fought bravely and valiantly for the Clan."

Icestar nodded sadly. The taking of his eighth life was unexpected: he did not know that he would go into battle today on his own, but

that was the fate of being a warrior.

Featherbreeze broke from the formation and started padding up to him. He realized that behind her, a little silver kit followed closely. His heart stopped once he realized who the kit was.

"Lightkit!" he gasped, looking down at his dead daughter. The little she-kit resembled Silverleaf beautifully, with deep blue eyes and stars that speckled her silver pelt.

"She wanted to see you," Featherbreeze said affectionately. "She could not bear to see you in such a situation."

The kit padded up to him and touched noses with him. All of a sudden, the pain in his neck ceased and he felt as if he were healed.

"This is all I can do for you," she mewed, staring up at him with big eyes. Icestar realized that this was the first time he heard his daughter's sweet voice, and it brought warmth to his chest. "It's the best I can do. The rest is up to you."

Icestar reluctantly pulled away from the little kit. He wanted to speak more to her, but he knew their time was limited. "Silverleaf and I miss you dearly, little one . . . I hope you are happy here."

Featherbreeze nudged the kit back. "She's quite fine here." His mother purred. "And you've done a wonderful job with Ravenkit and Dewkit."

Icestar dipped his head to her. "Thank you. Thank you all."

Featherbreeze and Lightkit padded back to where they came from, and all of his lives looked to him with confidence.

Brightstar spoke up once more. "I'm sure you know, but there is much to come, Icestar. There is no telling exactly what it is . . . but danger lurks from all sides. Keep MoonClan safe at all costs, and do your best to look out for the welfare of all the Clans in your alliance." The old MoonClan leader took a deep breath. "Know that we are always with you."

Icestar dipped his head gratefully and took one last look at everyone before he was returned to his body back in MoonClan.

Icestar woke silently. His eyes opened and he took a shallow breath. The gash on his neck was not as deep as it was before thanks to Lightkit, but he could tell it was still there by the sharp pain that stung. He scanned the area from his place limp on the ground and spotted the three bloodied rogues walking away, their backs turned to him, dragging the rabbit he had caught along with them in victory of their battle.

Once they were out of sight, he pulled himself up, wincing in pain and realizing that he felt weak from all the blood he had lost. But this was no time to wait for his Clanmates to find him; no, he had push through the pain to make it back there all by himself.

*I must get back to MoonClan . . . I must warn them.*

**A/N: the amount of readers this book has definitely went down because of how inactive I've been, buuut THAT'S OKAY! I hope they build up again, and if they don't, well, I'm still having fun with the few people who still read my book here. Thank you lovely people for supporting my works!**

**And as always, since I'm quite the messy human, I'm 100% open to constructive criticism and feedback. But please no hate! D: There's this comment thread that has been going on for the past 3 years on Icetail's Enemy of people arguing about whether constructive criticism is hate or not. The thread is kinda funny but just to clarify, helping me better my story is definitely not hate, if anything it's support! :) Now enjoy, and don't forget to comment to let me know what you think. <3**